

***Virgil's Last Dream
of Aeneas and Homer***

Art Aeon

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Dedicated to

Publius Vergilius Maro (70-19 BCE),

who inspired and nurtured me
to dream of what he left unsung
in this plain song.

Synopsis

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

by Art Aeon is a fictional narrative poem in the tercet stanza. It unfolds the imaginary dialogues between Augustus (63 BCE-14 CE), the first Roman emperor, and Varius Rufus (74-14 BCE), a literary executor of the great Roman poet, Publius Vergilius Maro (70-19 BCE), known as Virgil.

Varius reports Virgil's untimely death to Augustus and reveals that he keeps Virgil's unpublished manuscript of *The Aeneid*. At Augustus's request, Varius relates a succinct gist of the first six books of *The Aeneid* and what Virgil told him at his death about his numinous last dream on how the spirit of Aeneas guided Virgil to Dis to meet with the spirit of Homer, and what they discussed on the epic poetry:

In his dream, Virgil prayed to muse Calliope for inspiration to bring his *Aeneid* to a meaningful conclusion. Calliope suggested that Virgil invoke Aeneas to guide him for a supernatural adventure to meet Homer in Dis and ask for expert advice in improving his new epic. At Virgil's sincere invocation, Aeneas's spirit appeared to him. Eventually, Aeneas guided Virgil to the palace of the queen of the dead, Proserpina. In an impromptu symposium, held by Proserpina at the plea of Aeneas, Virgil met Homer-Meles, the author of *The Iliad*, and Homer-Outis, the author of *The Odyssey*. Virgil recited his *Aeneid* for his revered Greek poets.

After their earnest and enlightening discussions, the Greek bards convinced Virgil that his Aeneid was as good as a human could achieve. Proserpina announced that Virgil's visit to Dis was overdue; he should return to the world of the living.

At that point, Virgil awakes from his numinous dream and finds his dear friend Varius, waiting by his bed. He realizes that the time has come for him to depart from this world to Dis. Virgil requests Varius to publish *The Aeneid* as it is and impart his dream of Aeneas and Homer to others. Then Virgil gently passes away in peace.

Prologue

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer is a fictional narrative poem in the tercet stanza. It unfolds an imaginary dialogue between Augustus (63 BCE-14CE), the first Roman emperor, and Varius Rufus (74-14 BCE), the literary executor of the great Roman poet, Publius Vergilius Maro (70-19 BCE), known as Virgil.

[1] Varius comes to report the untimely death of Virgil to Augustus at his private library. Augustus is relieved to learn that Virgil's unborn brainchild did not perish with him as Varius has kept Virgil's manuscript of *The Aeneid*: a great epic, Homeric in its lofty style but Roman in its patriotic spirit.

[2] At the sincere behest of Augustus, Varius relates a pithy gist of the first six books of the *Aeneid*:

(2-a) The awful shipwreck of the Trojan fleets, commanded by Aeneas near Carthage;

(2-b) Aeneas's meeting with Queen Dido of Carthage, and her generous reception of the dire Trojans as guests;

(2-c) Aeneas's moving and heart-breaking retrospective narration of Troy's tragic fall and his wanderings over harsh wild seas to found his kingdom in Italy;

(2-d) The ardent love between Queen Dido and Aeneas that ended in Dido's tragic suicide as Aeneas left her, obeying the decree of the gods;

(2-e) Aeneas's supernatural adventure into Dis, the underworld of the dead, guided by Sybil, to see his dead father, Anchises in Elysium;

(2-f) Anchises's revelations to Aeneas about the great future of Roman empire to be founded by Aeneas in Italy.

[3] Deeply moved, Augustus requests Varius to bring the manuscript of Virgil's *Aeneid* to him to peruse it since he respects it as the patriotic bequest to him and all other Romans by his revered and beloved poet Virgil. He also asks Varius whether Virgil told him any last wishes that the emperor may fulfil. Varius says that Virgil did not request to commemorate him after his death. All that Virgil asked was that Varius hear his strange numinous last dream and reveal it to the world.

[4] At Augustus's request, Varius relates to him what Virgil has revealed about his dream:

(4-a) In Virgil's numinous dream, he climbed up to the summit of Mount Helicon and prayed to his muse Calliope for inspiration how to bring his unfinished *Aeneid* to a meaningful conclusion.

(4-b) Calliope suggested to Virgil to invoke Aeneas to guide him for a supernatural adventure to meet with Homer in Elysium and ask for expert advice on improving his *Aeneid*, if possible for humans.

(4-c) At Virgil's sincere invocation, Aeneas's spirit appeared to him. Virgil entreated Aeneas to guide him to visit Homer in Elysium and discuss how to improve his epic about Aeneas, called *The Aeneid*.

(4-d) At his request, Virgil recited *The Aeneid* to its protagonist. Aeneas asked Virgil why he wanted to see Homer rather than the great Mesopotamian poet, Sin-leqi-unninni who compiled *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

(4-e) At Virgil's earnest plea, Aeneas narrated the gist of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* for him. Virgil was enlightened to learn about the progenitor of the epic poetry.

(4-f) Eventually, Virgil undertook the heroic supernatural adventure to Dis, guided by Aeneas and they reached the palace of Queen Proserpina.

(4-g) Virgil met with *Homer-Meles*, the author of *The Iliad*, and *Homer-Outis*, the author of *The Odyssey* in an impromptu symposium, held by Proserpina at the plea of Aeneas.

(4-h) Virgil recited his *Aeneid* for the revered Greek poets in the presence of Aeneas and Queen Proserpina.

(4-i) Virgil's *Aeneid* deeply moved both *Homer-Meles* and *Homer-Outis*. Each of them asked perceptive questions and Virgil gave sincere answers. His revered ancient Greek masters of epics convinced Virgil that the *Aeneid* was as good as one might achieve as it was.

(4-j) Aeneas asked Homer-Meles how he could know anything about the enigmatic Trojan War and dared to write about it without any actual experiences of the War. Homer-Meles replied that he had invoked his muse to sing it to him. He claimed that his *Iliad* had relied on what he heard from the muse in him.

(4-k) Aeneas said that such a muse was nothing but the poetic conceit of a clever poet. Thus challenged, Homer-Meles offered to recite an episode of his *Iliad* for Aeneas, who fought in the Trojan War, to judge whether it made any sense to him or not.

(4-l) Homer-Meles recited the episode of *Hector's* last conversation with his wife *Andromache* before returning to the battlefields, never to come back alive (in Book 6 of *The Iliad*).

(4-m) Deeply moved, Aeneas acknowledged that it must be a divinely inspired sublime work. Suddenly, Aeneas took his leave to see his mother, Venus, in haste.

(4-n) Virgil asked Homer-Meles his serious questions about the perplexing portrayals of *Achilles* in the *Iliad*.

(4-o). Through sincere and thorough discussions, Homer-Meles expounded why he had portrayed his enigmatic protagonist, *Achilles*, as he wrote in *The Iliad*.

(4-p) Queen Proserpina announced that Virgil's impromptu visit of Dis was overdue; he should return to the world of the living.

[5] At this point, Virgil awakes from his numinous dream and finds his loyal friend Varius waiting by his bed. The gravely ill Virgil confides his numinous dream to Varius.

[6] Virgil realizes that the time has come for him to depart from this world to Dis. In composure, he whispered to Varius: "*Lo, here comes my ship to sail to the mystic realm of Dis! Now, I have to leave The Aeneid unfinished; and yet I am happy as it came deep from my heart and soul to sing of the supreme justice of Rome for the whole of humanity. Please let it see the light as it is!*" Then Virgil gently passes away in peace.

[7] When Varius finishes his recounting of Virgil's numinous last dream to Augustus, the deeply moved emperor speaks in tears: *"Please publish the sublime epic of our beloved Virgil, The Aeneid, as he had entrusted it to you before he left Rome to visit Greece. As for Virgil's numinous last dream, it is too abstruse for me to comprehend its profound meaning. Please write down what godlike Virgil has imparted to you as soon as possible, lest they may fade away from man's tenuous fleeting memories. I will keep them deep in the inner shrine of my heart; I revere them as devout Virgil's sublime timeless teachings to me and the whole of humanity, here and yet to come!"*

***Virgil's Last Dream
of Aeneas and Homer***

A Narrative Poem
in the Tercet Stanza

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*A messenger comes in
the emperor's private library,
where Augustus is immersed in reading.* 3

‘Hail Augustus! Forgive
me in conveying you a sad news:
Your beloved poet Virgil has passed away.’ 6

‘What? When and where did he
meet his untimely death?’ *says*
Augustus in surprise and dismay. ‘He died 9
yesterday, in Brundisium.’

‘Do you know who was with Virgil
at his death?’ ‘Yes. His devoted friend, Varius, 12
witnessed Virgil’s last day,’
says the messenger. ‘I want to
see Varius,’ *says Augustus resolutely.* 15

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

‘He is waiting outside
to have an audience with you.’
‘Let him come in right now,’ *says Augustus.* 18
The messenger exits.
Soon Varius enters. ‘Ah, Varius,
tell me how our beloved poet Virgil 21
met his untimely death,’
says Augustus in a sombre tone.
‘Virgil caught suddenly a sever fever 24
at Megara in Greece;
It grew worse while he travelled by sea
to come back to Rome. A few days after 27
he landed at Brundisium,
his sick body yielded to the stern call
of death,’ *says Varius in heartfelt sorrows.* 30

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

‘Ah, what a terrible
loss to us! I saw him in good
health, just last month in Athens. He told me 33
that he had been working
on an epic poem, yet he
subtly evaded to reveal what it was about. 36
Did he say anything about
his epic to you?’ *asks Augustus*
with great curiosity. ‘Yes, Augustus!’ 39
says Varius, ‘Virgil’s
sublime epic sings of Aeneas:
His eventful adventures across unknown seas 42
after the fall of Troy
to reach Latium; his heroic
struggles to found Rome in pious obedience 45

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

to the will of gods.' 'How
much I wish to read,' *says Augustus*
in a solemn voice, 'such a great heroic 48
epic! Many nations rise
and fall in brief dramas; rulers
strive and vanish. But Homer's great epics 51
shine forever in glory.'
'Virgil left a copy of the manuscript
of his epic, entitled *The Aeneid*, 54
for me to keep. Would you
care to read his whole epic someday?'
says Varius. 'What did you say? The Virgil's 57
unborn brainchild has not
been lost by his untimely death?'
says Augustus in sheer surprise and delight. 60

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

‘Virgil’s epic poem
breathes out vibrant spirit, matching
that of Homer’s: *The Aeneid* contains 63
about ten thousand verses in
twelve books; they are quite Homeric
in style, but deeply Roman in spirit,’ 66
says Varius with reverence.
‘It seems to me pure miracles
blessing us! When did Virgil entrust his 69
invaluable manuscript
to you?’ *says Augustus.* ‘Just before
he set out for Greece and Asia to improve 72
his *Aeneid*; at that time
he bade me to burn the manuscript
of his epic, which he regarded as yet 75

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unfinished, in the case
of his premature death while he
travelled abroad,' *says Varius*. 'Gods forbid it!' 78
says Augustus, 'may I
borrow your copy to read Virgil's
patriotic bequest to Rome?' 'Certainly, 81
Your Majesty! It is
a great honour for me to bring it
to you whenever you want,' *says Varius*. 84
'Would you please recite for me
how the Virgil's epic begins,
if you remember it,' *says Augustus*. 87
'Yes, I will, with pleasure:
"Once I tuned my song on slender reeds;
Then, leaving the woodlands, I constrained 90

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*the nearby fields to serve the husbandmen,
work welcome to farmers. But now, I sing
of arms and the man who from the coast 93
of Troy, exiled by fate, came to Italy and
Lavinian shores; much buffeted on sea
and land by violence from above, due to 96
cruel Juno's unforgiving wrath, and much
enduring in wars, till he should build a city,
and bring his gods to Latium; whence 99
came the Latin race, the lords of Alba,
and the walls of great Rome..."*

How his prologue sounds to you?" says Varius. 102

'I seem to hear the wise
eloquent voice of Homer, about
to sing of the lofty Roman heritage;' 105

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says Augustus with thrills,

‘I am enchanted to hear more. Please
keep on reciting the Virgil’s fascinating
epic.’ ‘I wish I could,’ 108

says Varius, ‘but my poor memory
cannot hold the entire complex epic,
unfolding in many books 111

sung in vibrant heroic verses!’
‘It must be a great imposing epic. 114

I wish to hear its gist,
if you can relate it to me,’
says Augustus with enthusiasm, ‘so that 117

I may grasp the quintessence
of Virgil’s heroic epic, right now.’

‘I will try my best;’ *says Varius,* ‘may Virgil’s 120

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spirit uplift my soul
to recap what he had divinely
sung for us, inspired by his blessing Muse.' 123
Varius pauses for a while
to concentrate his thoughts, then begins
to narrate in a gentle sonorous voice: 126
‘Virgil invokes his Muse
to reveal the unseen divine
decree on the destiny of Aeneas, 129
his Trojan followers,
and the future kingdoms of his
descendent in their promised new homeland 132
in Italy across vast seas:
When the proud queen of gods, Juno,
notices that the Trojan fleets, commanded by 135

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Aeneas are sailing freely
nearby the coasts of great Carthage
to reach their destined new homeland—Italy, 138
her galling anger erupts
like violent volcanoes. She incites
Aeolus, the god of storms, to wreck the Trojan 141
fleets with fierce hurricanes.
Soon overwhelming tempests devastate
the helpless Trojan fleets. However, just 144
in time, Neptune overhears
the unruly commotions of the sea.
Indignant, he asserts his divine power 147
over the sea by destiny,
quieting the destructive tempests,
and rescuing grounded Trojan ships and crews. 150

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

High in Olympus, the king
of gods and men, almighty Jupiter,
watches the dire troubles of piteous Trojans 153
while distraught Venus pleads
in tears that her son, Aeneas, be saved
to found Rome as decreed by destiny. 156
Jupiter assures her
that Aeneas will reach Italy,
and build a new nation in Latium, 159
defeating his fierce foes.
Then his son, Iulus, will rule,
moving his capital from Latium 162
to Alba Longa. For three
centuries that kingdom will be
ruled by Aeneas's descendent, until 165

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priestess Ilia will bear
twin sons, Romulus and Remus,
by Mars. Romulus will be the great king 168
who will build Rome with walls
of Mars and his people would be
called Romans. They will conquer contesting 171
nations, and govern the world
with justice in peace, and promote
mankind to achieve high civilization. 174
Jupiter comforts Venus
that eventually proud Juno
will abide with his decree and favour them 177
as he does. Such is a pithy
gist of the numinous aspect
of Virgil's moving human epic.' 180

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‘It seems a deep, poignant
divine drama,’ *says Augustus*,
‘on the destiny of striving humans. 183

Please keep on relating
how the heroes struggle to fulfill
what has been decreed by their destiny.’ 186

‘The first human episode
unfolds the ardent tragic love,’
says Varius, ‘between the legendary 189

founder of great Carthage—
wise Queen Dido and the helpless
refugee from shipwreck—valiant Aeneas.’ 192

‘I love to hear about such
a heroic, passionate love story;’
says Augustus, ‘tell me first who Dido was, 195

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and how she founded the great
powerful kingdom of Carthage.’
‘Dido was a daughter of Belus, king 198
of Tyre. She married Sychaeus,
a rich Phoenician. Her brother
Pygmalion murdered him secretly in greed 201
of his hidden huge wealth.
One day, the ghost of her husband
appeared in her dream and revealed the place 204
of his hidden treasures.
He urged Dido to escape from
the tyranny of Pygmalion in Tyre, 207
and to take valiant adventures
across vast seas to found a new
kingdom in Libya. As a courageous, upright, 210

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and prudent widow, Dido
led her loyal followers to found
the new powerful kingdom Carthage 213
with her resolute will,'
says Varius with deep reverence
for Dido. 'How astounding to learn,' *says* 216
Augustus, 'that a widow
could accomplish such a heroic
task of founding Carthage—our formidable 219
rival in the hegemony
of the world! How did Aeneas,
the future founder of Rome, and Dido, 222
the founder of Carthage,
fall in love with each other?' 'Venus
guided Aeneas to meet with Queen Dido,' 225

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says *Varius*, 'in her splendid
palace; he entreated for her mercy
to the shipwrecked Trojans in dire misery. 228

The gracious queen accepted
the Trojan refugees as honoured guests,
and held feasts to welcome and encourage them. 231

Amid the jubilant feast
Queen Dido requested Aeneas
to relate how he had escaped the fatal 234

fall of Troy and led Trojan
followers over vast perilous seas,
sailing by the coasts of Libya before 237

the tempests wrecked their ships.
At this point, Virgil cedes his role
of narrator to his character Aeneas 240

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who takes over the eloquent
and deeply moving recounting
of poignant and heartrending episodes 243
of his dire personal
experiences; he touches every heart,
especially Queen Dido's, with deep awe 246
and heartfelt pity, and yet
he also inspires all to breathe in
the sublime.' 'Tell me, Varius, how Virgil 249
makes his hero Aeneas
sing in such moving eloquence,'
says Augustus with genuine enthusiasm. 252
'A prosaic gist of
Aeneas's eloquent narration,'
says Varius, 'may be summed up as follows: 255

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Deep in the fateful night
of Troy's fatal doom, the sombre ghost
of wounded Hector appeared to Aeneas 258
in his nightmare and spoke:
*"Ah, flee, goddess-born; save yourself
from these fatal flames. The foe holds our walls; 261
Troy fell from her lofty height
in ruin. Our fatherland and Priam
came to an end. Troy entrusts to you her 264
holy things and household gods;
Take them with you to share your fortunes.
Seek for them a new mighty city which you 267
will found at last when you
have wandered over the seas." Thus said,
Hector brought forth from the sanctuary 270*

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sacred fillets, Vesta,
Lady of Hearth with her eternal
fire, and gave them to Aeneas in his dream. 273

Then Aeneas shook off
sleep, climbed to the rooftop, and saw
Troy engulfed by fierce devastating flames. 276

He fought grim, bloody combats
to reach the Priam's palace aflame
at the heart of Troy, besieged by the Greeks. 279

He climbed up its rooftop,
and saw how the old king, Priam,
met his heroic death by cruel Pyrrhus, 282

the rash son of Achilles.
Then terrible horrors overwhelmed
Aeneas; he stood aghast as there rose before 285

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him an apparition
of his father, Anchises, as he
looked on King Priam, close kin and like age, 288
gasping away his royal life.
Strange visions also came to his mind;
Of Creusa, his beloved wife, left forlorn; 291
of his house pillaged by
the Greeks; and of perilous threats
to their only son, Iulus. Then Aeneas 294
looked around him; he realized
that he alone stood there helplessly
forlorn—his loyal followers all perished. 297
Suddenly, his keen sight
spotted a female figure lurking
beyond the door sill of the Vesta—it was 300

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Helen, hiding secretly
in the sacred sanctuary.
Glare of fires lighted valiant Aeneas's steps, 303
and his keen eyes glanced over
the crucial sight. Terrified of
the Trojans' vengeance for the ruin of Troy, 306
also fearing of the Greeks'
punishment for her abandoned
husband's indignant angers, elusive 309
Helen, the common hatred
curse both to her homeland and Troy,
crouched by the altars, in cunning hiding. 312
Fire blazed up in Aeneas's
heart: angry desire to avenge
the ruin of Troy and punish Helen's sins. 315

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To himself spoke Aeneas:

*“Is Helen to look on Sparta
and Mycenae unscathed and go forth like 318
a queen in triumph? Is she
to see her husband and home, kin
and children, served by Trojan maids as slaves? 321
For this, must Priam perish?
Great Troy to be burnt down in ruins?
Our long shores to be soaked in blood for this? 324
Not so! Although there is
no glory in killing a woman
and such a feat can bring me no honour, 327
yet I shall have praise for
blotting out the unholy thing,
and exacting a just recompense. 330*

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*It will be a joy to have
filled full my soul with the fire of
vengeance and to have appeased the ashes of* 333
of my dear kin.” Thus blurting
out his thoughts, Aeneas rushed to
punish Helen in a frenzied mind. But at that 336
very moment, his goddess
mother, Venus, suddenly appeared,
caught him by the hand and held him back. 339
In the gracious voice of a loving
mother, she spoke to him: “*My son,*
what petty resentment stirs your unruly wrath? 342
Why this rage? Whither has
your care for me gone? Will you not
first hurry to where you left your father; 345

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*age-worn Anchises, or find
out whether your wife Creusa and
your son Iulus still live, or not? They* 348
*are cut off by Greek troops
foraging everywhere in Troy.
Had I not cared for them, the fire would by now* 351
*take them, their blood glutted
Greek swords. You must not hold Helen
the cause of this Troy's downfall, nor Paris.* 354
*It is the will of the gods
that overthrows Troy from her splendour
into the dust of ruin. Haste your flight, my son;* 357
*Put an end to your vain toil.
Never will I leave you but will
set you safely on your father's doorstep."* 360

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Thus spoke Venus vanished
in thick shades of the dreadful night.
Aeneas saw what the gods had decided. 363
He retreated, avoiding
scorching fires and foraging foes.
At last, he came back safe to his father's home. 366
When Aeneas tried to move
his household to safety in the mountains,
his father refused to join in their escape. 369
Anchises did not want
to prolong his impotent life,
or suffer miserable exile while hostile 372
gods had already destroyed
Troy; let him die alone at his own
ancient home in peace, dispensed with a burial. 375

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But his pious, devoted son
cried in dire despairs: "*Did you think,*
my father, I would ever forsake you?" 378
How could such impious words
fall from a father's lips? If it is
the will of gods to destroy Troy, if your 381
mind is set on adding
your death and ours to the fate
of Troy, the gate is wide open for such deaths: 384
Soon Pyrrhus will reach us,
steeped in the blood of Priam—mad
Pyrrhus who butchers the son before father's 387
eyes, then the father at
the sacred alters. Was it for
this doom, my gracious mother, that you saved me 390

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*amid fires and swords, to see
our foes in the heart of my home,
and Iulus, my father, and Creusa* 393
*at their side, all slaughtered
in each other's blood? To arms, men,
bring arms to me! The last light of life calls* 396
*the vanquished. Give me back
to the Greeks; let me challenge in
brave combats. We shall not die, unavenged!"* 399

Fully armed, Aeneas
hurried forth from the house; but at
the door, Creusa clasped his knees and held up 402
little Iulus to his
father and begged: *"If you go out
to die, take us, too, with you for common fate.* 405

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*But if you put some hope
in the armour you have donned from
past trials, guard first your own house right here.* 408

*If you go out, to whom
do you abandon Iulus,
your father, and me, once called the wife of
brave, faithful Aeneas?"* 411

Suddenly, a strange portent appeared;
It encouraged Anchises to join in exile, 414
seeking a new life.

Aeneas carried his frail father
on his sturdy shoulders, holding his young son's 417
hand, to reach a haven

before the foraging fires and foes
would engulf them. They strove to pass darkly 420

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treacherous paths. When they
came near the gate, their foes pursued.
Startled, Aeneas turned aside from the known 423
way, entering a maze
of pathless region. Struggling for life
or death, they reached the funeral mound and 426
shrine of Ceres for safety.
Then Aeneas realized in shock
that Creusa was missing. To rescue her, 429
he turned back alone into Troy;
Putting his life in danger, he traced
backward his steps in the deadly night. 432
He went back to his house,
hoping that his dear wife might wander
back there, but he saw his house burning ablaze. 435

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In his grief, Aeneas groaned
and called Creusa in endless quest
from door to door. Then to his illusion 438
appeared the ghost of Creusa.
He felt hairs rise on the head, his voice
clot in the throat. But she spoke to ease him: 441
*“What can you achieve by
yielding yourself to frantic grief,
my sweet husband? All things come to pass as 444
heaven has willed. You may not
take Creusa with you now; it was not
so ordained, nor does the lord of high Olympus 447
give you leave; long exile
waits for you, and vast seas to plow.
At last, you shall make landfall on Hesperia 450*

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

where Lydian Tiber flows
with gentle peace between rich farmlands;
The years will bear glad peace, a kingdom, and 453
a queen for you. Dismiss
these tears for your loving Creusa.
The great mother of the gods retains me— 456
a daughter of Priam
and wife of the son of Venus—
here on my native shores with dignity. 459
Farewell now; guard your love
for our common child!" Thus spoke,
she left Aeneas weeping heartbroken, 462
and faded into tenuous air.
Three times Aeneas tried to embrace her,
but her wraith slipped bodiless as winds faded 465

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

or like a flitting dream.

As the night waned, he rejoined his
family, and saw a great throng of new
refugees; they gathered
for exile, to be led by wise,
valiant Aeneas, acclaimed as their new king.

They toiled to build a fleet
of twenty sturdy ships, and hoisted sails
to the winds of destiny. They wandered
over open seas in exile,
encountering many strange peoples,
and enduring countless adversities
in which frail old Anchises
passed away. Thus ends Aeneas's moving
recall of awful throes of Troy and his own.'

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

‘It is a deeply poignant
tragedy;’ *says Augustus in*
pensive mood, ‘the warm, devout, integral 483
personality and
filial piety of Aeneas
as a human being outshine his valiant 486
verve as an invincible
hero in wars. Please tell me what
happened next in his adventurous life.’ 489
‘The warm womanly heart
of the widow, Queen Dido, responded
passionately to the sudden miraculous 492
encounter with the handsome
godlike hero Aeneas—the very
son of the goddess of love; Dido fell 495

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

deeply in love with Aeneas.

Next morning, Queen Dido confided
to her prudent sister Anna: "*Think what* 498

a stranger came yesterday
to lodge in our house: how princely,
how courageous, what a great hero! 501

I can believe him in
the line of gods, and this is not
a delusion. Telltale fear betrays inferior souls. 504

What scenes of the war fought
to the bitter end he depicted for us!
What dire buffetings awaited him at wild sea! 507

Had I not set my face
against remarriage after my first
love died and failed me, left me barren and 510

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*bereaved—sick to death at
the mere thought of torch and bridal bed—
I could perhaps give way in this one case 513
to frailty. I shall say it;
Since that time Sychaeus, my poor
husband, met his fate, and blood my brother 516
shed stained our hearth gods,
this godlike man alone has wrought upon
me deep and moved my soul to yield. I feel 519
the revival of an old flame
of old desire! But, O chaste life,
before I break your laws, I pray that Earth 522
may open, gape for me down
to its depth, or the omnipotent
with one stroke blast me to the shades; pale shades 525*

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*of Erebus and dark world
of night. That man who took me to
himself in youth has taken all my love;* 528
*May that man keep, hold it
forever with him in the tomb."*
Saying thus, Dido wept and wet her breast 531
with warm tears. But her wise
prudent sister Anna advised:
"Dearer to me than my own life, Dido, 534
*will you wear out your life,
young as you are, in solitary
mourning, never to know your sweet children,* 537
*or the crown of joy that Venus
brings? Do you believe this matters
to dust, to ghosts in tombs? Granted no suitors* 540

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*up to now have moved you,
neither in Libya nor before
in Tyre—Iarbas you rejected, and all others, 543
chieftains bred by the land
of Africa, their triumphs have enriched—
will you contend even against this god-sent love? 546
Have you considered in
whose lands you settled at risk?
On one frontier, the Gaetulans, people 549
invincible in war
with wild Numidian horsemen, and
the offshore banks, the Syrtes; on the other, 552
desert sands, bone-dry, where
fierce Barcaean nomads range.
Or need I speak of future wars brought on 555*

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*from Tyre and the menace
of your brother? Certainly by
the will of gods and mighty Juno's favour, 558
the ships from Ilium held
their course in the wind on the way to us.
Dear my sister, what a great city you 561
will see rising here, and what
a kingdom from this blessed royal match!
With Trojan soldiers as companions in arms 564
by what exploits will Punic
glory grow!" Thus encouraged by
her trusty sister, Queen Dido pursued the love 567
of Aeneas with ardent
passion. Her resplendent beauty
and gracious majesty attracted Aeneas's heart; 570*

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

Soon, both of them fell in
love passionately; Queen Dido
wished to marry Aeneas to rule over 573
Carthage as co-regents,
and encouraged his Trojan followers
to be equal partners in building up 576
and defending their new
nation in common. But her ardent
passion made her neglect her queenly 579
duty of steering Carthage
to rise as a new powerful
and splendid nation; massive construction 582
projects stalled idle; her people
suffered disappointments, frustrations,
and despairs. Sensible hero Aeneas 585

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

realized the impending
grave dangers. Furthermore, he saw
clear signs of the divine command to fulfill 588
his destiny to found
his new kingdom in Italy.
Overcoming his private affectionate 591
sentiments for Dido,
Aeneas resolved to sail to
Italy, obedient to the divine decree 594
to found his kingdom.
When the Trojan fleets commanded by
Aeneas departed from Carthage, Queen Dido 597
put herself to death to end
agonies of remorse and resentment.'
'What a tragic end of such an ambitious, 600

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

passionate, and heroic
queen!' *says Augustus in gentle*
voice, 'Queen Dido reminds me of Cleopatra 603
of Egypt. How did Dido's
death affect our hero Aeneas?'
'He was unaware of what had happened in 606
Carthage,' *says Varius*, 'as
he was struggling to overcome
severe tempests at sea; the Trojan fleets 609
were driven back to
Sicily where dead Anchises
had been buried since their previous visit 612
a year ago. King Acestes
of Sicily welcomed them back.
With his generous supports, Aeneas 615

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

held various games for his
Trojan followers to compete
for coveted prizes in commemoration 618
of Anchises. While the men
were excited to compete in the games,
some Trojan women who were worn out by 621
their endless, hopeless, harsh
wanderings at wild seas incited
others to burn down their ships so that they 624
would settle in Sicily.
In shock, the Trojan men halted their games,
and rushed to save their ships on fire, set by 627
their mad dejected wives.
Aeneas was stunned by the bold
rebellion, torn by diverse conflicting 630

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

schemes in disconcerting
anxieties. Suddenly, Anchises's
image appeared out of the night sky, 633
and spoke: "*My son, dearer
to me than life while life remained,
and now pitted against the destiny of Troy,* 636
*I come by Jove's command.
Embark for Italy with only
the bravest chosen; leave the meek weak here.* 639
*In Latium, you must battle
down in wars a hard race by training.
First, however, visit the underworld,* 642
*dark halls of Dis, and through
deep Avernus come to meet me.
Black Tartarus with its grim realm is not* 645

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*my home, but radiant
gatherings of godly souls I have
about me in Elysium. To that place, wise 648
Sibyl will conduct you,
after your offer of many black sheep.
Then you will hear of your whole race to come 651
and what walled city is
given you. Farewell, my dear son!
Night passes midway on her wheeling course, 654
and cruel Sunrise fans me
with a breath her labouring team
exhales.” Then the spectre of Anchises 657
faded away like subtle smoke
into the void. Resolutely
Aeneas decided to carry out what 660*

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

Anchises had commanded:
He chose men of brave hearts, keen for
war and winning honour; they repaired ships 663
and set out to open sea
to fulfill their destiny in
Italy, while the weak stayed in Sicily, 666
protected by King Acestes.’
‘How about the supernatural
visit to the underworld of the dead 669
to meet his father, Anchises?
Did Aeneas succeed in carrying
out such a difficult miraculous task?’ 672
asks Augustus with great
curiosity. ‘Yes, the poetic
genius of Virgil made it possible 675

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

for his hero, Aeneas,
to accomplish such a numinous
feat, Augustus!' *says Varius*. 'Tell me how 678
such a miracle was
accomplished,' *says the emperor*
elated in thrills. 'The Trojan fleet arrived 681
at Cumae,' *says Varius*,
'where the revered Sibyl resided
in a huge dark cave. Aeneas visited her 684
and entreated: "*Awe-inspiring*
prophetess, foreknowing things to come,
I ask no kingdom other than fate allows me; 687
Let our people settle in
Latium." The Sibyl of Cumae
sang out her riddles, echoing the cave: 690

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*“Now you quit the sea’s dangers,
but greater are in store on land;
The Trojans will reach Lavinian land 693
but there will wish they had
not come; wars, vicious wars I see
ahead, and Tiber foaming blood.” Bold Aeneas 696
spoke: “I knew them; I went
through them in my mind. One thing I
pray for: since it is here one finds the dark 699
passage to the underworld,
may I have leave to go there and see
my dear father, Anchises. Please guide me! 702
Through fires and with thousands of
spears behind, I had brought him on
my shoulders and rescued him amid our enemies. 705*

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*He shared my voyage, bore all
seas with me, hard nights and days of
menace from the sea and the sky beyond 708
the strength and lot of old age,
frail though he was. Indeed, he prayed
this very prayer; he told me that I should come 711
to you and beg it earnestly.
Pity a son and father, gracious
lady; all this is in your power. Hecate 714
gave you the authority
to have and hold Avernus wood.”
The Sibyl said: “The way downward is easy. 717
The gate to dark Dis is open
for all. But to retrace your steps
back to light is very hard; there is the toil. 720*

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*Avernus leads to dark
forests, then to Cocytus winding
through the desolate gloom. But if you feel 723
such love and desire to see
your father, crossing the Stygian
water and viewing the Tartarus twice— 726
if such a mad adventure
is what you wish to take, then you
must first prove your ability for it. 729*

*There is a strange bough whose
leaves and pliant twigs are all of gold.
Lush groves shelter it and thick shades of dusky 732
valleys shut it in. Yet
no one may come back from hidden
depths below unless he picks this rare bough 735*

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*with its foliage of gold;
Proserpina decreed this bough
as her due. Hence, search for it in the forests.* 738
*If you are called by fate,
you will obtain the crucial bough.”*
Guided by two doves, sent by his divine mother, 741
Aeneas found the golden
bough, hidden deep in the gorge of
Avernus and carried it to the Sibyl's cave. 744
The Sibyl cried: “Away,
*all those unblessed, away! Depart from
this cavern! But you, Aeneas, enter* 747
*this path to the dark deep
with bold, brave, resolute resolve!”*
Hurling herself wildly into the depth 750

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

of the dark mystic cavern,
the Sibyl led Aeneas striding
boldly at her heels. Passing through horrible 753
phantoms, they reached the shores
of Acheron. Thick with mud, whirlpools
out of a vast abyss boiled up and belched 756
stinking slits it carried
into Cocytus. The ferryman
Charon was the king of this gruesome region: 759
He looked foul and terrible,
his beard grown wild and hoar, his staring
eyes sending out fires. Alone he poled his boat 762
and set sails; in his rusty hull,
he ferried the dead for timeless ages.
Countless souls came here, streaming to the banks. 765

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

They stood begging to be
first to be ferried and reached out
longing hands to the other unseen shore. 768

But the grim boatman took
only some aboard, waving the rest back
from the strand. In wonder at this and touched 771
by the sad commotion,

Aeneas asked: *"Tell me, prophetess,
what this means, the countless miserable throngs, 774
waiting at the banks. Where are
these souls bound to? How are they tested,
and chosen to take oars to cross the dead water?" 777*

The ancient Sibyl replied:
*"Charon may not take the dead until
their bones rest properly in the graves, or 780*

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*till they flutter and roam
this side a hundred years, and then
may come back to cross the deep they long for.”* 783

As they reached the Stygian
banks, Charon cried out aloud: “*Who are
you in armour, visiting alive here? Speak* 786
*from where you are, stop there,
say why you came. This is the realm
of the Shades, drowsy Sleep, and Night.* 789

*It breaks the eternal law
for the Stygian boat to carry
living bodies!”* The Sibyl spoke to angry 792

Charon: “*Here is Aeneas
of Troy, remarkable for loyalty
as well as great in arms, courage, and wisdom.* 795

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*He goes through the deep shades
of Erebus to see his father,
Anchises in Elysium. If the very* 798
*image of his goodness
moves you not at all, look this bough
to be offered to Queen Proserpina* 801
by this pious hero!"
Charon fixed his eyes on the bough
in a great surprise and respect; he turned 804
his dusky boat and made for shore.
From the long thwarts where they sat, he
cleared the other souls and made the gangway 807
wide, letting the massive
man alive step in the shaky shabby bilge.
The leaky coracle groaned at the heavy weight 810

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

and took a flood of swampy
water in. At last, Charon reached
the other side of Acheron and put ashore 813
Aeneas and the Sibyl.
There they saw Great Cerberus barking
with his triple throat that made all shorelines 816
tremble. The Sibyl tossed him
a lump of honey and a drugged meal
to make him drowse. Three ravenous gullets 819
gaped and he snapped up the sop.
Then his huge bulk collapsed and lay down
through the cave. Seeing the watchdog fallen 822
deep in sleep, avid Aeneas
took the opening; swiftly, he turned
away from the river over which no soul returns. 825

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

They came to the Field of Mourning;
Here were those whom pitiless love
consumed with cruel wasting, hidden on paths 828
apart by myrtle woodland
growing overhead. In death itself,
their anguish of love would not let them be. 831
Among them, with her fatal
wound still fresh, Queen Dido wandered
the dark wood. In shock, Aeneas saw her dim 834
figure. He wept and spoke
tenderly to her: "*Dido, so
forlorn, the sad rumour which came to me 837
was true; that you had met
your tragic end by your own hand.
Was I the cause? I swear by heaven's stars,* 840

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*by the high gods, by any
certainty below the earth, I left
your land against my will, my Queen. The gods' 843
commands drove me to do
their will, as now they drive me through
this dark world of shades. I could not believe 846
that I would hurt you so
terribly by leaving. Wait a little.
Do not leave my sight. Am I someone 849
to flee from? The last word
destiny lets me say to you
is this." Aeneas with such heartfelt pleas 852
tried to placate the burning
soul of Dido, fiercely glaring back.
But she had turned with gaze fixed on the ground 855*

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

as he spoke on, her face
no more affected than as if she were
a stone. Then she flung away from him, and fled 858
into the shadowy grove where
Sychaeus, her husband, joined in
her sorrows and returned her love. Aeneas 861
still gazed after her in tears,
shaken by her ill fate and pitying her.
The Sibyl spoke to him: "*Come now, be on* 864
your way and carry out
your mission. Let us go faster.
I can see the walls the Cyclops' forges built, 867
the portico and gate
where they command us to leave the bough."
In haste, the two strode on dark paths to the gate. 870

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

Aeneas gained the entrance,
cleansed his body with fresh water, and
dedicated the bough to the Queen of the Dead. 873

Now that this ritual
was performed, at last, they came to
places of delight where souls take ease amid 876

the Blessed Groves. Wider expanses
of high air endowed each vista
with a wealth of light. Here settled in heroes 879

of high heart and handsome
scions born in greater eras.

Aeneas marvelled to see their chariots 882

and gear far off, all phantoms.

He saw souls who feasted and chorused
out hymns praising Apollo in fragrant 885

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

laurel grove. They were heroes
who suffered wounds in the battle for
their country; those who in their lives were chaste 888
holy men; or those who
bettered human life by finding out
new truths and skills; or those who contributed 891
benefaction to others.
They all wore snowy chaplets on their
brows. To these souls, mingling on all sides, 894
the Sibyl spoke: "*Tell us,*
happy souls, what region holds
Anchises? Where is his resting place? For him 897
we came here, ferrying across
the rivers of Erebus." A great soul
answered: "*None of us has one fixed home here:* 900

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*We walk in shadowy groves,
and bed on riverbanks carefree.
If your hearts are set to find Anchises, 903
I shall point out an easy path.”*

So saying, he walked ahead and showed
them from the height the sweep of shining plane. 906

At that time, Anchises
spotted his beloved son coming afar.
He rushed to welcome him and spoke in tears: 909
“You have come, at last, my son!
Your devout loyalty to me
has conquered fears and perils of your hard 912
adventures to this dark realm
of the dead. I greet you alive here,
my beloved son! How many lands behind you, 915

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*how many seas, what harsh blows
and dire dangers you have overcome!
How much I feared the land of Libya* 918
might do you harm with charm.”
Then Aeneas spoke: “*Your spirit,
my dear father, often came to my mind,* 921
*and impelled me to visit
this strange realm of Dis. This gracious
Sibyl guided me to make this numinous* 924
*adventure possible
to see you here at last. Let us
thank her for her compassionate mercy.”* 927
Anchises and his son
humbly knelt to thank the Sibyl.
Aeneas noticed that countless souls gathered 930

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

along the banks of a strange stream.
He asked what river flowed, and what
peoples made such a huge throng there. Anchises 933
explained: "*They are the souls*
for whom a second body is in store.
Their drink is water of Lethe; it frees them 936
from care in forgetfulness.
For all this time, I have so much
desired to show you these things and tell you 939
of them face to face—to take
the roster of my children's children here,
so you may feel with me more happiness 942
at finding Italy."
Elated with wonder Aeneas asked:
"*Must we imagine, father, there are souls that* 945

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*go from here aloft to upper
heaven, and once more return to bodies'
dead weight? The poor souls, how can they crave 948
for our daylight so much?"*

*Anchises said: "I will explain
each point to you, my son, not to leave you lost: 951*

*First, the sky and lands and
sheets of water, the bright moon's globe,
the Titan sun and stars, are fed within 954*

*by Spirit, and a Mind,
infused through all the members of
the world, makes one great living body of the mass. 957*

*From Spirit came the races
of man and beast on lands, birds in
the air, and fishes in waters. The fiery energy 960*

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*from a heavenly source
belongs to the generative seeds
of all these creatures; so far as they are not* 963
*poisoned or clogged by
mortal bodies, their free essence
dimmed by earthiness and deathliness of flesh.* 966
*This makes them fear and crave,
rejoice and grieve. Imprisoned in
the darkness of the body, they cannot see* 969
*clearly the heaven's air;
In fact, even when life departs
on the last day, not all the scourges of* 972
*the body pass from the poor soul,
not all distress of life. Inevitably,
many malformations, growing together* 975

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*in mysterious ways,
become inveterate. Hence, they
must undergo the discipline of stern 978
punishments and pay in
penance for old sins: some hang full
length in the empty winds, for others the stain 981
of wrong is washed by floods,
or burnt away by fire. We suffer
each his own shade. We are sent through wide 984
Elysium, where a few
abide in happy lands, till the long day,
the round of Time fulfilled, has worn our stains 987
away, leaving the soul's heaven-
sent perception clear to see the pure light
of the heaven. These other souls, when they 990*

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*have turned Time's wheel a thousand
years, the god calls in the crowd to
Lethe stream, so that they may see the heavens,* 993
*again, and wish to re-enter
into bodies, without remembering
their previous lives."* Here paused Anchises. 996

He drew both Aeneas
and the Sibyl into the middle
of the murmuring crowd to view the souls 999
as they came forward, one
by one, and to take note of each.

Elated with great excitements Anchises spoke: 1002

*"What lofty glories follow
Dardan generations in after years,
and from Italian blood what famous children* 1005

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*in your line will come, souls
of the future, living in our name,
I shall tell you clearly, now, and in my telling 1008
teach you your destiny,
my son. That one you see, the young man
leaning on a spear unarmed, has his allotted 1011
place nearest the light. He will
be the first to take the upper air,
Silvius, a child with half Italian blood 1014
and an Alban name, your last
born, whom your wife, Lavinia,
late in your great age will rear in forests 1017
to be king and father of kings.
Through him our race will rule in Alba
Longa. Next to him is Procas, then Capys, 1020*

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*then Numitor, and then
Silvius Aeneas, both in arms
and piety, your peer. Then Romulus, fathered 1023
by Mars, will come to make
himself his grandfather's companion,
reared by his mother Ilia, in the bloodline 1026
of Assaracus. Look, my son,
under his auspices illustrious
Rome will bound her power with earth, her spirit 1029
with Olympus. She will
enclose her seven hills with one great
city wall, fortunate in the men she breeds. 1032
Turn your eyes this way; see
your own Romans. Here is Caesar,
and all the line of Iulus, all who shall pass 1035*

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*under the dome of the great sky:
This is the man, this very one, of whom
so often you have heard the great promise— 1038
Caesar Augustus, son
of the deified, who shall bring again
the Age of Gold to Latium, the land where 1041
Saturn reigned in early times:
He will extend his power beyond
Garamantes and Indians, over far territories 1044
north and south, the solar way,
where Atlas, heaven-bearing on
his shoulder, turns the night sphere, studded 1047
with burning stars. At that man's
coming, the realms of Caspia
and Maeotia tremble and the seven mouths 1050*

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

of Nile go dark with fears.
Do we lag still at carrying
our valour into action? Can our fear 1053
prevent our settling
in Ausonia?" Thus Anchises
exhorted his loyal son, Aeneas, to 1056
fulfill his sacred mission
of founding Rome in Italy.'
Here pauses Varius as he notices warm tears 1059
streaming down from the eyes
of deeply elated Augustus.
Glorious rays of the setting sun pervade 1062
the private library
of the great wise emperor.
At last, the first among all citizens of Rome 1065

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

breaks the deep vigil of
eloquent silence: 'I marvel at
our Virgil's poetic genius: How subtly 1068
 he recounted the mythic
origin and great long history
of Rome in the divine prophecies, told 1071
 by Anchises to his brave
devout son; How Aeneas took
such perilous adventures through Dis 1074
 to learn of the future
from his father! I'm deeply moved
to learn that Virgil has included my name 1077
 in the divine prophecy
of the future history of Rome
in such a grandeur beyond what I deserve. 1080

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

At any rate, I am convinced
that Virgil bestowed us a great work
of art that will outshine all my toils of arms 1083
and sweats to glorify Rome.
With heartfelt gratitude and
humility, I will peruse his *Aeneid*. 1086
Please bring Virgil's *Aeneid*
to me right now, Varius. I shall
stay here until I finish perusing it,' 1089
says Augustus resolutely.
'I will bring it to you, right away,
to see the light, at last,' *says Varius.* 1092
'Thank you, my loyal friend.
Let a troop of my guards escort you
for your safe and prompt trip,' *says the emperor.* 1095

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

Varius leaves for the trip.
Augustus muses in deep thoughts alone.
He begins to read Virgil's Eclogues. 1098
A servant comes in and says,
'It is time for dinner, Your Highness.'
'I will have a simple supper with Varius, 1101
here, when he returns,' says
the emperor. Dusk spreads dark veils.
Twinkling stars flow in celestial rivers. 1104
At last, Varius comes back;
He presents the manuscript of
Virgil's Aeneid to pensive Augustus. 1107
'Thank you, Varius. I will
peruse this spiritual legacy,
bequeathed to Rome by our revered Virgil.' 1110

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

The emperor and Varius
enjoy a simple late supper.

'I wonder how Virgil met his death;' *says* 1113

Augustus, 'Did he wish
anything specific for us to do
to commemorate him?' 'No, he did not make 1116
any request to us for
his remembrance in public.

All what he wanted me to do was to listen 1119
to his strange, mysterious,

and numinous last dream. May I
relate it to you, now, Augustus?' 'Yes, 1122

certainly, if you think
that it is pertinent for me
to hear about his private dream,' *says Augustus.* 1125

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*Varius tries to concentrate
his mind; then he begins to relate
what he saw and heard on the last day of* 1128
his revered friend Virgil:
‘When I reached the quiet room where
Virgil had lain gravely ill, I found him 1131
in a deep sleep. He seemed to
talk with someone in his dream, but
I could grasp nothing from his faint murmurs. 1134
In dire despairs, I waited.
At last, Virgil woke up and spoke
beaming spiritual light from his pale face: 1137
“O, you came to be with me
at my end, my gracious, dear friend,
Varius! I wish to confide you,” said he, 1140

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

“my strange numinous dream.”

*“Tell me your dream, Virgil; Your words
will be inscribed deep in my heart,” said I.* 1143

*“In my marvellous dream,
I climbed up Mount Helicon alone,
and invoked Calliope to inspire me* 1146

*how to save my forlorn
Aeneid to a new life. Suddenly,
a beauteous young lady appeared to me:* 1149

*She bade me to sing for her
The Aeneid. Elated in deep awe
and sheer thrills, I recited it with all my heart.* 1152

*Then Calliope spoke in
her beautiful voice of ecstatic
harmony: “What you have sung is as good* 1155

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

as a human can achieve.””

““I was inspired by the sublime
epics of Home to write my *Aeneid*; 1158

But I realize that it is
a task beyond my wit and lot
to complete it as Homer did his epics 1161
so perfectly,”” *said I*

in humility. ““You must know that
there is no work of art which is truly 1164
perfect. If you wish to learn

this plain truth, try to meet your idol,
Homer, in Dis and discuss with him about 1167
the epic poetry.

Are you willing to take such a bold
adventure to Dis for your enlightenment?”” 1170

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

“How much I wish that I could
meet godlike Homer and learn from
the supreme master the art of epic poetry! 1173

But how could I dare to try
such an impossible numinous
adventure to Dis?” *said I in despair.* 1176

“You are an expert in
making up such a story better
than anyone else: You have made the Sybil 1179

of Cumae guide your brave
protagonist, Aeneas, to visit
his father, Anchises, and to learn about 1182

his own fate and the future
of Rome so masterfully, I aver.
I suggest that you pray to invoke Aeneas, 1185

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

and entreat him to guide you
to visit Homer and other
ancient poets in Dis to enlighten you!”” 1188
Then Calliope disappeared,”
said Virgil. *“It is a marvellous*
and numinous dream, indeed! What happened, 1191
next?” asked I, elated in thrills.
Beaming subtle smiles, Virgil resumed
imparting his dream: *“I invoked Aeneas* 1194
to help me with heartfelt
prayers. Then a splendid figure
appeared to me and spoke in a solemn tone: 1197
““Who are you? Why did you
invoke me in such earnest prayer?””
““O Aeneas, our godlike forefather! 1200

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

I am a humble poet
from Rome; I have tried to sing of you
in my epic, entitled *The Aeneid* 1203
deep from my heart and soul!
But I realize that it is a task
beyond my wit and lot to complete it 1206
to a meaningful ending,”
confessed I to my hero in awe.
“A poet of Rome, singing of Aeneas 1209
in an epic poem?
Would you please sing it for me!” *said*
he with sincere and enthusiastic curiosity. 1212
Trembling in deep awe,
I began to recite The Aeneid
to its heroic protagonist—very Aeneas 1215

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*in his person—listening
to me with his full attention.
When I finished my rendering, at last, 1218
he spoke in solemnity:*
““Thank you, my son, for your devout
patriotic spirit for Rome. What is your name? 1221
Why do you loiter here
in Greece, neglecting your sacred task
of bringing forth your epic into the light?”” 1224
““I am a Roman, called
Virgil. I wish to visit Homer
in Elysium, and to learn how to complete 1227
my epic to a meaningful
conclusion. I implore you to guide me
through Dis to meet Homer,”” *pleaded I in earnest.* 1230

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

“I don’t know who Homer is.
Why do you want to see him rather
than the great epic poet, Sin-leqi-unninni?”” 1233
asks Aeneas. “Homer is
the supreme poet of the Hellenic
world. He sang the superb heroic epics, 1236
The Iliad and The Odyssey,
which have inspired me to write
my *Aeneid* in his eloquent epic mode. 1239
Please teach me what epic
Sin-leqi-unnini wrote; I am utterly
ignorant about his work,”” *confessed I.* 1242
“Have you not read yet
The Epic of Gilgamesh?”” *said*
Aeneas. “No. I am eager to learn about it. 1245

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

What are the main themes of
The Epic of Gilgamesh?” asked I
with genuine enthusiasm. Then our greatest 1248
forefather, godlike Aeneas
spoke: “I will recite for you, my son,
The Prologue of The Epic of Gilgamesh: 1251
““He who saw the Deep,
the country’s foundation, was wise
in all matters! He saw what was secret; 1254
He discovered what was
hidden; he brought back the eras
unknown before the Deluge. He adventured 1257
far away, was weary, found peace,
and set all his labours on a tablet
of stone. He built the rampart of Uruk, 1260

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*the holy temple, Eanna,
for ANU, ARURU, and ISHTAR...
See the tablet box of cedar; release* 1263
*its firm claps of bronze!
Lift the lid of its secret, pick up
the tablet of lapis lazuli, and read out* 1266
*the travails of Gilgamesh,
all that the hero went through!””*
What do you think of its *Prologue*, Virgil?”” 1269
“I am deeply inspired
to hear such a prudent, profound,
and moving voice. Please help me find 1272
the entire text of
The Epic of Gilgamesh. I wish
to read it as soon as it is possible!’ 1275

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

exclaimed I in elation.

“It is written in cuneiform script
of Akkadian language. Can you read it?”” 1278

“No, I cannot!”” *cried I*
in despairs, “did you read *Gilgamesh*
in that mysterious, now-extinct language?”” 1281

“In my youth, I studied how
to read and write in Akkadian
at the renowned School of Scribes in Babylon. 1284

On wet clay tablets
in cuneiform script, I copied
the entire text of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 1287

compiled by the superb
Babylonian poet and master scribe,
called Sin-leqi-unninni,”” *said Aeneas.* 1290

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

“Do you mean that Sin-
leqi-unninni is not the author
of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*?” asked I 1293
in surprise. “The *Epic*
had gradually evolved from
a simpler and much older text of ancient Sumer 1296
for more than two-thousand-years;
Countless unknown poets contributed
to establish its final edition,” said Aeneas. 1299
Humbly, I prostrated and
entreated to Aeneas: “I realize
that I can never read by myself 1302
The Epic of Gilgamesh
to attain its vital inspiration.
I implore you to narrate *The Epic* to me 1305

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

to enlighten my dull
ignorant soul to see the light
through your perceptive intellectual eyes!”” 1308
*Aeneas was rapt in a deep
meditation; then he spoke: “I will
try to relate its pithy gist for you, Virgil: 1311
Gilgamesh surpassed all
other kings; he was heroic
in stature, the brave scion of Uruk, 1314
and the strong bull on
the rampage. Going at the forefront,
he was the invincible vanguard; guarding 1317
at the rear end, he was
the loyal protector of his comrades
in wars. King Lugalbanda was his sire; 1320*

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Goddess NINSUN, well versed
in counsel, was his loving mother.
When he grew tall his beauty was consummate; 1323
By earthly standard, he was
the most handsome man. His head held aloft
in pride, Gilgamesh lorded Uruk in tyranny: 1326
He had no equal when
he wielded his weapons. The young men
of Uruk he harassed without warrant, 1329
letting no son go free
to his father. By day and by night,
his tyranny grew harsher; he made no daughter 1332
go free to her mother,
nor girl go free to her bridegroom.
The people of Uruk voiced their troubles 1335

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

to ANU, the mighty father
of all gods: ““*A savage wild bull*
you have bred in Uruk; Although Gilgamesh is 1338
our shepherd-king, powerful
expert, and pre-eminent protector,
he lets no girl go free to her bridegroom.”” 1341
The almighty god ANU
heeded their complaint. He summoned
his wife, ARURU, the greatest goddess, 1344
and spoke: “*You, ARURU*
who created the humans, now fashion
what ANU has thought of: Make an equal 1347
of Gilgamesh; let him
be a match for the storm of his heart;
Let them vie each other so that Uruk may be 1350

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

rested!" The goddess ARURU
heard these words of ANU. She took
a pinch of clay, breathed life into it, and threw 1353
it down into the wild.
She made the wild man, Enkidu,
who was brought up by beasts in the wild. 1356
‘A hunter saw the wild man
who pulled up his snares and set free
the trapped beasts, ruining all his work. He 1359
reported what had happened
to King Gilgamesh. He ordered
the hunter to take with him Shamat, 1362
the harlot, to meet the wild
man, and enthrall him with her expert
woman’s art of making love to man, and 1365

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bring him to Uruk to vie
with Gilgamesh. Shamat met
Enkidu, lured him to leave the wildness, 1368
tamed him, and then led him
to Uruk. One day, Enkidu blocked
the door of a wedding house, not allowing 1371
Gilgamesh to enter;
They seized each other and contested
their powers. Soon both of them recognized 1374
that they were great equals
like twins; they quit fighting and vowed
each other that they would be faithful friends 1377
to the end. NINSUN blessed
them as brave, splendid, and loving
brothers. Gilgamesh convened the assembly 1380

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

of Uruk, and spoke from
his throne: “*“Hear me, elders of Uruk:
I will venture afar to the thick Forest of* 1383
*Cedar with my brave trusty
companion, Enkidu, and conquer
its strong ferocious guardian, Humbaba.* 1386
*Let the whole world learn
that Uruk’s offshoot is mighty. I will
establish a name eternal for my heroic deed.””* 1389
Enkidu offered counsel:
“*“Who would dare to conquer Humbaba?
His voice is the Deluge; his speech is fire;* 1392
*his breath is death! The god
of Earth, ENLIL made it his lot
to terrify men to keep his scared Forest* 1395

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

of Cedar safe.”” Then elders
spoke: ““*You are young, Gilgamesh,*
borne along by pride and passion; you do not 1398
understand what you are
talking to do.”” But proud Gilgamesh
was adamant. He pleaded NINSUN to obtain 1401
crucial help from the sun god,
SHAMASH, for his daring expedition.
Gilgamesh and Enkidu ventured forth afar 1404
to conquer Humbaba.
After long hard journeys, they reached
the thick Forest of Cedars, and met head-on with 1407
powerful Humbaba.
Fiercely, they fought for life or death
in gory struggles. With the crucial help of 1410

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

SHAMASH, Gilgamesh
defeated Humbaba; he begged
Gilgamesh to spare his life, but Enkidu said: 1413
 *““Gilgamesh, slay him before
ENLIL hears what we do! The great gods
will take against us in anger. Establish your fame 1416
 that will endure forever
how Gilgamesh slew Humbaba!””*
Hence, Gilgamesh smote Humbaba in the neck, 1419
 carried the severed head
as his trophy and returned to Uruk
with Enkidu in glory of his heroic triumph. 1422
 The people of Uruk
welcomed Gilgamesh as their great
heroic king; they adored him as if he were 1425

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

a god. Soon, ISHTAR,
the goddess of love and war, fell
in love with valiant Gilgamesh; she proposed: 1428
 *““Come Gilgamesh, be you,
my bridegroom! Grant me your fruits!
Be you, my dear husband and I, your wife!””* 1431
But Gilgamesh refused
her lure, recounting how cruelly
she had ruined wretched victims of her previous 1434
 love-affairs. In furious rages,
the insulted ISHTAR pleaded her
father, ANU: *““Proud arrogant Gilgamesh* 1437
 *scorned me with foulest
slanders and vile insults. Let me have
the Bull of Heaven so that I may punish him* 1440

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

for his audacity.

If you forbid it, I will smash

the gates of the Netherworld, and bring up 1443

the dead to consume

the living!”” Reluctantly, ANU

gave her the Bull of Heaven. When ISHTAR 1446

came down with the Bull,

it devastated Uruk, killing

many hundreds of people. Brave Enkidu 1449

rushed to the rear of

the Bull. He seized it by its tail.

Then Gilgamesh thrust in his knife between 1452

the yoke of the horns like

a skilled butcher. After they had

slain the Bull, they bore its heart aloft, and 1455

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

offered it to SHAMASH.
Suddenly, Enkidu fell deadly
sick. In awful delirium, he saw the gods 1458
condemning him to death.
When he awoke, he spoke to Gilgamesh:
““Hear me, my brother, what I saw in my dream: 1461
In the assembly of the gods,
ANU spoke to ENLIL: “““Because
they slew the Bull of Heaven and Humbaba, 1464
one of them must die, now.”””
Enlil said: “““Let Enkidu die first!”””
Hence soon, I shall cross the threshold of death, 1467
and sit among the dead!
I who endured all hardship with you,
remember me, my brother, Gilgamesh. 1470

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*Do not forget all what
I went through with you!””* Enkidu lay
on the bed; his sickness worsened day by day, 1473
never to rise again.
On his last hour Enkidu spoke
to Gilgamesh: ““*My god has taken against me:* 1476
*I do not die like one
who falls in the midst of battle:*
I shall not make my name!”” The sudden death 1479
of brave young Enkidu
was like a fatal deathblow to
Gilgamesh in ghastly fears of death, 1482
tormenting him endlessly.
After solemn stately funeral
of his beloved companion Enkidu, 1485

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Gilgamesh left his kingship
of Uruk, and wandered the wildness
to find Utnapishtim, the sage at the end 1488
of this world who had
attained his immortality. At last, he
came to Mashu, the twin peaks where the sun rose 1491
and set. They guarded the sun's
daily journey. Their high summits
supported the fabric of heaven, while their deep 1494
base reached down to the dark
Netherworld. There were scorpion-men,
guarding its gate, whose terror was dreadful, 1497
whose piercing keen glance was
like death. Gilgamesh saw them; in fear
and dread he covered his face; then he regained 1500

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

his guts, and drew nearer
to them. The scorpion-man called out:
“*“How did you come here in such a far way? How* 1503
did you cross the seas whose
passages are perilous? Let me learn
of your journey from afar!”” Gilgamesh said: 1506
“*“I am Gilgamesh from*
Uruk; I am seeking the way
to reach my forefather, Utnapishtim, 1509
who attended the gods’
assembly, and attained life
eternal; he shall tell me the secret 1512
of death and life!”” “*“Never*
before was there one like you,
Gilgamesh. Never did anyone travel 1515

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*the mystic path through this
mountain. For twelve double hours,
its dark interior extends; light there is none.* 1518

*How will you go through it? ” ”
“ “My will is resolute to reach
the Distant Realm of immortality.* 1521

*I will endure all
adversities in humility,
and overcome dire perils to achieve* 1524

*my sacred vows. Humbly
I implore you to allow me
to enter your gate, ” ” said Gilgamesh.* 1527

*“ “Go, Gilgamesh! May Mashu
allow you to pass; may it help you
continue your journey in safety! ” ” said* 1530

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the guardian. Gilgamesh
took to heart what he heard; he took
the hidden path of the Sun God. The darkness 1533
was dense inside; light was
there none; it did not allow him
to see behind. He kept on pursuing forward. 1536
Reaching twelve double-hours,
Gilgamesh came out at last ahead
of the sun. He saw a marvellous garden, 1539
resplendent with many trees
of jewels growing on their branches
in splendour by the shore of the mystic sea. 1542
Siduri was a tavern-
keeper who lived by the seashore.
She saw a stranger, clad in a pelt and fearful 1545

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to look on, coming towards
her dwelling. Alarmed, she barred her gate,
and went up on the roof. Gilgamesh threatened 1548
to smash the door and shatter
the bolt. Siduri asked who he was
and why he had come to her. Gilgamesh 1551
told her what he had achieved.
*““If you and Enkidu were such brave
heroes who slew Humbaba and the Bull
of Heaven,””* asked Shiduri,
*““Why are your cheeks so hollow,
your face so sunken, and your mood so wretched 1557
in sorrow? Why do you
wander the wild, clad in lion’s pelt?””*
““My friend Enkidu, whom I loved so dear, 1560

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*who went with me through
every danger, the doom of mortals
overtook him. I did not surrender his body* 1563
*for burial until maggots
dropped from his nostrils. Then I became
afraid that I, too, would die. I grew fearful* 1566
*of death; What became
of Enkidu was too much to bear,
so, on far paths, I wander the wildness.* 1569
*How can I stay quiet?
Shall I not also lie down soon, never
to rise again through eternity? Tell me where* 1572
*the road to Utnapishtim is!
What is its landmark? If it may
be done, I will cross the sea to see him;* 1575

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*If not, I will wander
the wild, ”” said Gilgamesh in earnest.
““Never there has been a path across nor since 1578
olden days can help any
human cross the sea. It is perilous,
full of hazard; Its midway lies the Waters 1581
of Death. But if you
could persuade Urshanabi,
the boatman of Utnapishtim, and his crews, 1584
the Stone Ones, they may help
you. Go then, Gilgamesh, to the forest
to find him picking pines. Let him see your face. 1587
If it may be to go
with him to cross the sea, go; if not,
turn around and go back home in peace! ”” said she. 1590*

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Gilgamesh found them
in the forest; he rushed down on them;
The Stone Ones, who crewed the boat without 1593
being harmed by the Waters
of Death, rash Gilgamesh smashed, and
threw them in the river. Astounded Urshanabi said: 1596
 *““Who are you? Why have you
come here, afar?”” ““I am Gilgamesh
from Uruk. I wandered long looking for 1599
Utnapishtim to learn
the mystery of death and life. Please
help me reach his unseen realm of Distant!”” 1602
 ““Ah, rash Gilgamesh! You
hampered your goal by smashing
the Stone Ones, my dear expert crews. If you 1605*

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*want to cross the Waters
of Death on my boat, cut three hundred
long punting poles, trim them with a boss, and bring* 1608
them to me, ”” said Urshanabi
in a stern voice. Willingly, Gilgamesh
obeyed him. At last, they launched the boat. 1611
When they came to the Waters
of Death, Urshanabi said: ““*Take
punting poles, Gilgamesh! Don’t touch water* 1614
lest you die. ”” When Gilgamesh
had used all punting poles, Urshanabi
took off his garment to use it as a sail. 1617
After much toils, they reached safe
the blessed shore. At last, Gilgamesh
saw Utnapishtim, the immortal Distant, 1620

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face to face, and said:

““I look at you, Utnapishtim;

Your form is no different from mine; you are 1623

just like me. How did you

stand with the gods in their assembly?

How did you find the life eternal?”” Then 1626

Utnapishtim spoke:

““I will reveal to you, Gilgamesh,

a matter most secret: The gods decided 1629

to send down the Deluge.

Wise god EA said to me: “““Demolish

the house and build a boat! Abandon wealth and 1632

seek survival! Spurn property,

save life! Take on board the boat all

living things’ seeds!””” I built the boat in time. 1635

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*As the weather became
foreboding, I went into the boat.
Soon, gale winds flattened the country, then came 1638
the Deluge: The dreadful
cataclysm devastated the people.
Even the gods took fright at the Deluge. 1641
They left and went up to
the heaven of ANU, lying like dogs
curled up in the open. Goddess ARARU 1644
cried out like a woman
in childbirth, whose voice was so sweet:
“““The olden times have turned to clay, because 1647
I spoke evil in the gods’
assembly. How could I declare
a war to destroy my people? It is I 1650*

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who gave birth to them; they
are mine! And now, like fish, they fill
the sea!"" *When the Deluge ended at last,* 1653
I made offerings to
the gods in thanks. They gathered like
flies around me, making sacrifices. Then ARARU 1656
came, and said: ""All gods shall
come to enjoy the incense except
ENLIL, because he lacked counsel and brought 1659
on the Deluge, and destroyed
my people."" But ENLIL arrived;
He saw the boat. He was seized with anger, 1662
filled with rage at the gods
of Igigi: ""How did this man escape
the Deluge? No one was meant to survive 1665

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the destruction!"" NINTURA
said to ENLIL: ""“Who, if not EA,
could cause such a thing? EA alone knows how 1668
all things should be done.””
Then wise god EA spoke to ENLIL:
""“You, the chief of the gods, ENLIL, how could 1671
you lack counsel and bring on
the Deluge? We should punish only
those who do wrong and transgress, not the good 1674
and innocent people.
I did not disclose the gods’ secret
to Utnapishtim: His wise mind foresaw 1677
the gods’ secret. Now, ENLIL,
you decide what to do with him!""
Then ENLIL came up inside my boat: 1680

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*Touching our foreheads,
ENLIL blessed my wife and me:*
“Utnapishtim was a mortal man, but now 1683
he and his wife shall become
like us gods! They shall dwell far away,
where the rivers flow forth!”” *Thus have we* 1686
attained our eternal life,
Gilgamesh.”” The wise sage finished
his recollection of the mystic past. 1689
““Now I understand how
you became immortal;”” said Gilgamesh,
““Please tell me how I should search for such 1692
an eternal life?””
““I know not who would convene for you
the gods’ assembly to decide it. Let me 1695

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test you for an easy trial:
For six days and seven nights, come,
do without slumber!”” But Gilgamesh fell into 1698
a deep sleep as soon as
he squatted down. When Utnapishtim
awoke him at the end of the entire test period, 1701
wretched Gilgamesh bewailed:
““O Utnapishtim, what should I do?
Where should I go? A thief has taken hold 1704
of my flesh! Death abides
in my bedchamber; wherever
I turn, there too will be death!”” Utnapishtim 1707
spoke to his boatman: ““May
the quay reject you, Urshanabi;
The ferry scorns you! You who used to walk 1710

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*this shore, I banish you
from it now! For the man that you
led here, take him to the washtub and clean him: 1713
Let him cast off his filthy pelts
to the sea; let his body be soaked till fair;
Let him wear royal robes, fitting to his dignity! 1716
Until he reaches the end
of his road and home in his city,
let the robe stay clean and fresh!”” Then his caring 1719
wife said: ““Gilgamesh came
here by toil and travail. What have you
given the hero for his homeward journey?”” 1722
At the departure of
Gilgamesh with Urshanabi,
the sage spoke: ““There grows a magic plant 1725*

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*in the Ocean Below;
It looks like a boxthorn. It prickles
like a dog-rose and will prick one who plucks it.* 1728
*But if you can possess this plant,
you will stay young as long as you
keep it.”” On the way home, Gilgamesh dived* 1731
*deep down to the bottom
of the Ocean; He found the plant,
and took it with him up the shore. In joy,* 1734
*he spoke to the boatman:
““This plant, Urshanabi, is the Plant
of Heartbeat; with it, a man can regain* 1737
*his vigour. To Uruk
I will take it; to an ancient
I will feed some and put the plant to the test.* 1740

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Its name shall be “““Old man
grown young;””” *I will eat it myself*
to keep my youth!”” While Gilgamesh bathed in 1743
refreshing pool, a snake caught
scent of the plant, came up in stealth,
and bore the plant off. Then Gilgamesh lamented: 1746
““*For whom toiled my arms so hard?*
For what ran dry the blood of my heart?
Not for myself did I find the bounty. Had I 1749
only turned back and left
the boat on the shore!”” Bearing all
hard toils, travails, and despairs, Gilgamesh 1752
and his loyal friend arrived
in Uruk at last. In tears, he spoke:
““*O Urshanabi, climb Uruk’s wall, and walk* 1755

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*back and forth! Survey
its foundation! Were its bricks not
fired in the oven? Did seven sages not lay* 1758
its invincible foundation? ” ” ”

At the end of his heroic
journey of life, lying on his deathbed, 1761
never to rise again,
Gilgamesh had a numinous dream:
He was drawn nigh to the assembly 1764
of the gods. ANU spoke:
“ “ *Gilgamesh! You have travelled each
and every road, fetched the unique cedar* 1767
*down from its mountain home,
smitten Humbaba in his forest, and
killed the Bull of Heaven. You have set up* 1770

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*monuments for future days,
founded temples of the gods, and reached
Utnapishtim in his Distant abode! The rite 1773
of Sumer, forgotten there
since far-off days of old, the rituals
and customs, it was you who brought them back 1776
to the land. Hence shall you be
the divine judge of the dead forever!'''*
Thus, concludes The Epic of Gilgamesh, 1779
as I remember it
since my cherished youth,''' said Aeneas.
*Elated in deep awe and wonder, I exalted 1782
our divine forefather:*
“Thank you, godlike Aeneas, for
your kind enlightening me to see a glimpse 1785

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

of the light in the dark
journey of my life. *The Epic*
of Gilgamesh takes my breath away in awe, 1788
heartfelt empathy, and sublime
spiritual awakening to learn how deep
the wise ancient poets saw the mystery 1791
of the human destiny.””
Eloquent silence prevailed while
Aeneas and I immersed deep in private 1794
meditation.” Here Virgil
paused his numinous narration,’
says Varius, elated in awe and wonder. 1797
‘It is a numinous
and inspiring dream, indeed, that
Virgil confided to you before his death;’ 1800

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

says Augustus in
solemnity, 'I will send my envoys
to find the so-called Epic of Gilgamesh 1803
in all renowned libraries
throughout Mesopotamia.' 'It will
be a miraculous revival of the progenitor 1806
of the sublime art
of the epic poetry,' says
Varius with heartfelt enthusiasm. 1809
'If we find the original
text of The Epic of Gilgamesh,
then I will request you to invite experts 1812
of the Mesopotamian
language and literature to
translate it into Latin at this library. 1815

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

For now, let us return
to Virgil's dream; Did he resume
to confiding it to you, or was it the end?' 1818
asks Augustus. 'When Virgil
rested a while, I was so anxious and
eager to hear his fascinating narration: 1821
"Please tell me what happened
next, Virgil. Did you persuade
Aeneas to guide you to see Homer in Dis?" 1824
Beaming subtle smiles,
Virgil said: "*After his narration*
of The Epic of Gilgamesh for me, 1827
Aeneas asked me to tell
the gist of Homer's epics. Hence,
I told him that The Iliad narrated about 1830

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*the Trojan War in its tenth-last
year; The Odyssey was about Odysseus's
terrible homecoming after the sack of Troy.* 1833

“Did Homer witness
the Trojan War as an Archaean
soldier?” *asked Aeneas.* “No! He was a Greek 1836

poet who wrote his epics
on the Trojan War, four centuries
after it occurred,” *said I.* ‘If so, how could 1839

Homer really know what
happened in the Trojan War?” *asked he.*

“Homer did not claim that he had a direct 1842
knowledge on the Trojan War;

He attributed what he wrote to his muse
who had sung to him with her divine authority 1845

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

for its validity,”” said I.
““It is a glib, sly, and artful conceit.
I want to meet Homer myself, and hear 1848
what he presumes to know
about the intricate and treacherous
Trojan War. Let us descend to Dis to meet 1851
Homer, first; if he cannot
resolve your problem, then let us
strive to find Sin-leqi-unninni for his help. 1854
Bring the manuscript of
your *Aeneid* with you as you may
need to show it to prove who you are,”” said 1857
Aeneas resolutely.
Elated in awe and sheer thrills, I
followed godlike Aeneas. Passing through 1860

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*horrible sights, morbid
noises, and repugnant stench, we
arrived at the stark, bleak banks of Acheron.* 1863

*Turbid weltering
out of the gloomy doleful abyss
boiled up and yawned to devour me in fear.* 1866

*Its devilish ferryman,
Charon, roared: “Who are you? Why did
you come here alive before your destined time?”* 1869

*“Muse Calliope urged me
to visit Homer, the bard divine,
in the Elysium. I beseech you to carry me
safe across this fateful river
to reach the blissful shore of peace
where the blessed live in eternity,”* *pleaded I.* 1875

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

“Stop your nonsense! This is
the realm of the dead. No living
body is allowed to cross over this deep river 1878
of dark fate,” *growled Charon.*

“With your sharp oar, cut off the frail
paltry thread of my life; thus dead, let me 1881
cross the fate, and meet Homer
to complete my poem,” *entreated I.*

“No! I must not commit such a crime. Yet 1884
your sincere piety moves me.
If you are a faithful pupil of
the gracious muse, write your hymn to the bard 1887
and give it to me. I will
try to make it conveyed to Homer,
if he can be found somewhere among countless 1890

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

shades. I recall ferrying him
good seven centuries ago on this boat,””
said Charon. Then prudent Aeneas spoke with 1893
regal majesty: “Do not
delay but ferry us to the temple
of Queen Proserpina. Look, this is 1896
the golden epic, composed
by this bard supreme of great Rome.
Queen Proserpina expects to hear the epic, 1899
recited by its very author,
our glorious poet Virgil here!””
No more talk—Charon obeyed and ferried 1902
us across Acheron to
the temple of Proserpina.
With my scroll of The Aeneid, Aeneas 1905

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*entered the stark temple,
bidding me to wait at the gate
until he comes back after a meeting* 1908
with Proserpina.” Here
paused frail Virgil in deep thoughts.
Yet, my eager ear could not wait idly in such 1911
a thrilling suspense: “*What*
happened next? Did Aeneas succeed
in finding Homer for you? Did you meet 1914
Homer face to face, and
discuss with him about your Aeneid?”
Smiling at my impatient questions, Virgil 1917
resumed relating his dream:
“*Lingering at the gate of the temple,*
I waited long in dire qualms about why I 1920

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*had dared to take this bold
adventure beyond my lot and ken.
In bitter shame and remorse, I repented* 1923
*my inane vanity. At last,
a courtier came out of the temple
and escorted me to a cozy inner chamber.* 1926
Queen Proserpina spoke:
“Are you Virgil, the bard of Rome?”
“I am but a humble minstrel who had sung 1929
of the joys of pastoral
works and husbandry in Italy.
Inspired by the heroic epics of Homer, 1932
I strove lately to sing
of Aeneas, the godlike forefather
of Rome,” *said I, trembling in awe.* 1935

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

“Is it your wish to meet
Homers, and discuss with them how
to improve your epic?” *asked Proserpina.* 1938

“Yes, your Divine Majesty,
That is my earnest wish,” *said I.*

“The two most renowned Homers you meet now: 1941
On my right side sits Meles—
the Homer of *Iliad*; on my left, Outis—
the Homer of *Odyssey*. Now, we would like 1944
to hear you reciting
your new epic, *The Aeneid*.

I regret that many centuries have passed 1947
in bare sterility without
producing a good epic poem
since *The Odyssey*,” *said Proserpina.* 1950

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*Then prudent father Aeneas
encouraged me in a gentle voice:*
“Arise Virgil! This is the time for you 1953
to outshine the Greeks
in poetry as well as we have
excelled them in arms and in governing 1956
the world with justice
and integrity with our supreme
Roman laws.” *I prayed to the muses for 1959
their inspirations and
began to recite The Aeneid
deep from my heart and soul. Somehow, I was 1962
completely immersed in
my art; I became unaware of
what eminent poets were listening to me. 1965*

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*When I finished reciting
the whole epic, I fainted from
exhaustion and strange, subtle elation.* 1968

*I turned my eyes to Aeneas;
His eyes were shining in tears.
Queen Proserpina thanked me for reciting.* 1971

*Then Meles, the Homer of
Iliad, came to me, and spoke:
“Poet supreme of the glorious Rome,
your superb epic moves
me deeply in awe and wonder.”* 1974

*Humbly, I bowed to him and said: “O Homer,
my poet divine! How
am I to behold you in your very
person? You are so gracious to come* 1980

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

and hear my humble work.
I beseech you to help me finish it
as you have inspired me to begin it.” 1983
“Man cannot perfect art;”
said Meles, “Your *Aeneid* is good
as any work of art that one may achieve. 1986
It is a whole-hearted epic
of the lofty theme and passionate
patriotic objective to glorify your 1989
beloved fatherland—Rome.
Why do you think that I had anything
to do for you to embark on such a task?” 1992
“The very idea to sing
of Aeneas to be the founding
forefather of Rome,” *said I in excitement*, 1995

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

“came from your *Iliad*:

In your Book Twenty, you wrote that

Poseidon said: “*“We may take Aeneas out* 1998

of danger, and make sure

that Zeus shall not be angered

by his death at Achilles’s hands. His fate 2001

is to escape to ensure

that the great line of Dardanus

may not unseeded perish from the world. 2004

For Zeus cared more for

Dardanus of all the sons he had

by women, and now Zeus has turned against 2007

the family of Priam.

Therefore, Aeneas and his sons

and theirs will be lords over the Trojans 2010

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

to be born hereafter.””

Do you recall the above episode?””

““Yes, I recognize it now. But I must

2013

admit that I was utterly

unaware of its significance

until I heard what you had sung in your

2016

Aeneid,”” said Meles.

At that time, Outis, the Homer

of Odyssey spoke to me: ““Your Aeneid

2019

is an inspiring art;

Its outer style may resemble

to Meles’s heroic *Iliad*, but its deep

2022

substance and lofty spirit

are entirely your own Roman!””

With heartfelt reverence, I bowed to him

2025

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

and said: ““O poet sublime
who wrought the moving *Odyssey*,
please forgive me for my poor imitation 2028
of your divine genius
in handing over to your hero,
Odysseus, your own privilege—the very 2031
art of singing stories:
I have let *Aeneas* take over
me to narrate the awful fall of Troy, 2034
his perilous escape with
his shattered family, and harsh
hard wandering over vast tempestuous seas.”” 2037
““All works of art,”” *said Outis*,
““are imitations. What matters
is whether they have their own mind, or not. 2040

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

In your *Aeneid*, I breathe
in afresh uplifting, vibrant verve;
In the person of *Aeneas*, you have created 2043
a vivid new hero;
He embodies the prudence and self-
control of an *Odysseus*; the nobility 2046
and valour of a *Hector*;
the prowess and divine parentage
of an *Achilles*, all in one. Most of all, 2049
your *Aeneas* is a good
human being: a faithful son,
loving father, trusty husband, man of piety 2052
with meek humility.
You have revived the glory of
epic from the ashes of its long decay.”” 2055

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*Overwhelmed by his remark,
I fell speechless. Then Meles spoke:*
“How well you have mastered, my dear Virgil, 2058
the sublime art of Outis’s
genius to make your *Aeneas* bring
back to life his memories of the Troy’s fall 2061
and his dire wanderings
over harsh seas! His storytelling
enthrals not only Dido but all of us 2064
beyond his audience in
the story. From where did you come
up with such concrete, vivid episodes of 2067
the Troy’s fall as if you
had witnessed it yourself?” “I took
them from the *Sack of Ilium* and *Aethiopsis*, 2070

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

attributed to Arctinus:

They were the main resources from
which I adopted some as crucial events
of Troy's fall," said I. 2073

"Those works, called *the Epic Cycle*,"
said Meles, "are rich in materials, but poor
in their artistic merit. 2076

Your *Aeneid* breathes out vibrant art,
reviving both the form and the spirit
of the old heroic 2079

epics. Now, Virgil, tell us about
your *Dido*; a widow's heroic task
of founding a powerful 2082

nation in a foreign land; her ardent
love of *Aeneas*, and her tragic ending 2085

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

of her own life when her
beloved *Aeneas* left her, sailing
away to found the future Rome in Italia— 2088
How did you master such
superb art of a moving drama?”
““The sublime tragedies of great Greek poets,”” 2091
said I, ““imbued me with
their art of dramas.”” ““I’m delighted
to hear that you learned the superb art from 2094
the Greek tragedies; they
are, indeed, wondrous miracles,””
said Meles, ““like phoenixes arisen from ashes 2097
of the olden epics.
How stoutly Aeschylus revives
the heroic spirit in his stately solemn 2100

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

tragedies; how deeply
Euripides digs out man's utter
sufferings of heartrending agonies. 2103

And in those deeply moving
tragedies sung by Sophocles,
how sublimely man's pure conscience transcends 2106
what the fate has confined
in such beauteous nobility!

These poets have built spiritual monuments, 2109
enlightening the mankind
like the guiding beacons amid dark
seas of being both in life and after death.” 2112

““The tragedy of *Dido*
is meant to presage the crucial
future events in the history of Rome,”” 2115

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

said I with hesitation."

Here paused Virgil rapt in deep thoughts.'

'What a revealing dream!' *exclaims Augustus* 2118

elated in awe and wonder,

'*Dido* reminds me of the long,

fell Punic Wars; Hannibal, the Scipios... 2121

Virgil alluded to harsh

actual tragedies of fierce

crucial wars for survival in our own 2124

history. How could the ancient

poets understand what Virgil

meant with *Dido's* tragedy? At any rate, 2127

I wonder how the mystic

dream of Virgil went on, or did it

end abruptly at this point?' 'When Virgil 2130

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

rested for a while,' says *Varius*,
resuming his recounting of
Virgil's dream to Augustus, 'I asked him 2133
how his conversations
with the divine poets went on.
Frail Virgil beamed a subtle smile and said: 2136
"At that point, wise Outis
asked me about Aeneas's visit
to the underworld of the dead. He said: 2139
"You've conjured up, Virgil,
such wondrously imaginative
and deeply moving episode of Aeneas's 2142
adventure to the dark,
cryptic realm of the dead to seek
for his father. From where such ingenious 2145

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

idea came to your fertile
mind?”” “From your *Odyssey*, it dawned
to me. You recall, Outis, how *Odysseus* 2148
held down his audience
spellbound in awe and wonder when
he spoke of his meetings with the ghosts of 2151
renowned heroes and ladies
in Erebus.”” ““Yes, I do. I let
Odysseus tell old myths and fabulous 2154
new stories, but they lacked
lively sparks of wisdom, revealed
in your work; my ghosts were inept and inane 2157
like glib fibs in fables;
In his visit to the darkly Hades,
Odysseus did not learn any new profound 2160

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

wisdom of the cosmos.

But your ghost of *Anchises*—he
has such keen foresight and profound wisdom 2163
to teach *Aeneas* the deep
mysteries of the cosmos: how the world
began; how diverse forms of life emerged; 2166
How the mind and the body
interacted to live; how the souls
underwent purgation of sins through birth, 2169
death, and rebirth. How did
you create such a grand cosmic drama—
your *Myth of Aeneas*?” ““Wise Plato inspired me,”” 2172
confessed I, ““to pursue
philosophy through his profound
Dialogues; *The Myth of Er* in the last part 2175

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

of Plato's *The Republic*
was the very fountain of wisdom
that nourished me to make *Aeneas* as *Er*: 2178
The messenger returned
from the netherworld to reveal
the mystery of cosmic drama of birth, 2181
death, and rebirth of each
being. Did you meet Plato, Outis?"
"Yes, we've kept on our incessant dialogues 2184
for over three centuries."
"What have you discussed for so long?"
asked I in thrills. "On philosophy and 2187
poetry," *said Outis.*
"What do you think of the Plato's view
on poetry?" "Plato makes his *Dialogues* 2190

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

far more dramatic than
most poets can put up their plays
on the stage. He is, I think, a real poet 2193
whose theme is wisdom
rather than events and actions.
He is a master of witty dramatic 2196
irony: the crafty maker
of such a fanciful tale as
his *Myth of Er* in concluding his clever 2199
arguments should be the very
first one among all poets to be
expelled from his own *Ideal State*, conjured 2202
up in his enchanting
fairy tale. Wouldn't you agree with me,
Virgil?" "“Yes, I do,”” *said I definitely.* 2205

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

At this point, Aeneas spoke
to Queen Proserpina: “I wish
*to ask Meles about his epic, *The Iliad*.* 2208

Virgil told me that it was
about the Trojan War. I wonder
how he could know what had really happened 2211
in the intriguing and
treacherous Trojan War, which occurred
four centuries before his time.” “O son of 2214
Venus, we welcome
your wise participation in
our dialogue on the epic poetry. 2217

You are not only brave hero
who fought in the Trojan War in
your person but also the rare scholar 2220

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

who mastered the classic
language and poetry of ancient
Mesopotamia. I am eager to hear 2223
how Meles would respond to
Aeneas's questions,"" *said Proserpina.*
Then Meles bowed politely to Aeneas, 2226
and spoke: "I confess that
I do not know what happened during
the Trojan War. My *Iliad* is not its 2229
factual chronology.
I merely sang what I heard from
divine muses: whether they told me false tales 2232
which they made up to
amuse us, or real events which
occurred, I am utterly unable to verify. 2235

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

As you have fought in
and witnessed yourself the Trojan War,
you are the unique one who has the true 2238
authority to relate us
your concrete personal experiences
of the complex and confusing Trojan War.”” 2241
“I marvel at your glib
art of poetic conceit: you
attribute whatever you have conjure up 2244
to divine muses, impressing
on your audiences to believe as if
what you sing were all true,”” *said Aeneas.* 2247
“The vital verve of
a true epic poem is its
creative imaginations which impart deep 2250

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

into our minds the truth
and the sublime beauty beyond
mundane events and facts; the quintessential 2253
task of a poet is
to reveal certain truths by
poetic expressions of what he has 2256
imagined within his mind:
Coherent unfolding of related
episodes in such moving ways that the characters 2259
in his poem will impart
us deep wisdom about our own life.
The objective of poetry is to express 2262
meaningful wisdom by
creating coherent and moving
stories with real or purely imagined events 2265

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

rather than to report
mundane facts of the real world
in concrete descriptions, I trust,”” *said Meles* 2268
with a firm conviction.
““Would you please show me a concrete
example to understand what you imply,”” 2271
said Aeneas. Meles mediated.
Then he replied: ““I will narrate
an imaginary yet pertinent episode 2274
from *The Iliad*;
It is the last dialogue between
Hector and his loving wife, Andromache, 2277
at the high tower of
the Scaean Gates before Hector
returns to the battlefields, never to 2280

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

come back his home alive:

Andromache entreats to Hector

shedding warm tears: ““*You, Hector—you are* 2283

my father now, my noble

mother, a brother too as well as

my valiant, trusty, godlike, beloved husband! 2286

Take your stand on this rampart

right here, before you orphan your son

and make your wife a miserable widow.”” 2289

Galant Hector replies:

““*All this deeply weighs on my mind too,* 2292

my gracious beloved wife! But I would die

of shame to face the men

of Troy and the Trojan women

trailing their long robes, if I would shrink from 2295

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*our fierce, dire battles now,
a coward. Nor does the spirit
urge me in that way. I have learned it all too well: 2298
To stand up bravely,
always to fight in the front ranks
of Trojan soldiers, winning my father 2301
great glory, glory for
myself. For in my heart and soul,
I also know this well; the day will come 2304
when sacred Troy must die,
Priam must die and all his people
with him, Priam, who hurls the strong ash spear... 2307
Even so, it is less
the pain of the Trojans still to come
that weighs me down, not even Hecuba herself, 2310*

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*or King Priam, or the thought
that my own brothers in all their
numbers, all their gallant courage, may tumble 2313
in the dust, crushed by enemies.
That is nothing, nothing beside
your agony when some brazen Argive hales you 2316
off in tears, wrenching away
your day of light and freedom! Then
far off in the land of Argos, you must live, 2319
labouring at a loom,
at another woman's beck and call,
fetching water at some spring—the rough yoke 2322
of necessity at your neck.
And a man may say, who sees your
streaming tears: There is the wife of Hector, 2325*

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the bravest fighter they
could field, those stallion-breaking
Trojans, long ago, when men fought for Troy. 2328
So he will say and fresh grief
will swell your heart once more, widowed,
robed of the one man strong enough to fight off 2331
your day of slavery.
No, no, let the earth come pilling
over my dead body before I hear your cries, 2334
I hear you dragged away!””
In the same breath, shinning Hector
reached down his son—but the boy recoiled, 2337
cringing against his nurse's
full breast, screaming out at the sight
of his own father, terrified by the flashing bronze, 2340

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

the horsehair crest, the great
ridge of the helmet nodding, bristling
terror—so it struck his eyes. His loving 2343
father laughed, and his mother
smiled too. Then glorious Hector,
quickly lifting the helmet from his head, 2346
set it down on the ground,
fiery in the sunlight. Gently raising
his son, Hector kissed and tossed him in his arms 2349
and lift a player to Zeus
and other deathless gods: ““*Zeus, all*
immortals! Grant this boy, my son, may be 2352
first in glory among the Trojans,
strong and brave like me, and rule all
Troy in power and one day let them say: 2355

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

He is a better man
than his father! —*when he comes home*
from battle, bearing the bloody gear of mortal 2358
enemy he has killed in war—
he is a joy to his mother's heart.””
So, Hector prayed and placed his son in the arms 2361
of his loving wife.
Andromache pressed the child to her
scented breast, smiling in her tears. Her husband 2364
noticed, and filled with pity;
Hector stroke her gently trying
to reassure his wife, repeating her name: 2367
““*Andromache, my dear wife,*
Why so desperate? Why so much grief
for me? No man will hurl me down to death, 2370

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

against my fate. And Fate?
No one alive has ever escaped it,
neither brave man nor coward; I tell you— 2373
Fate is born with us the day
that we are born. So please go home
and tend to your tasks, the distaff and 2376
the loom, and keep the women
working hard too. As for the fighting,
men will see to that, all who were born in Troy 2379
but I most of all.””
Gleaming in arms, Hector took up
his horse-hair crest helmet once again to go back 2382
to the fierce battlefields.
His loving wife went home, turning,
glancing back endlessly and weeping in awe.”” 2385

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

Here ended Homer-Meles
his breathtaking narration,” said
Virgil in deep elation.’ ‘It is, indeed, 2388
a profound numinous dream!’
says pensive Augustus, ‘I wonder
how Aeneas would have responded to Homer, 2391
if such a dream continued.’
‘When I asked the same question to
Virgil,’ *says Varius, ‘he replied beaming smiles:* 2394
“At this point, Aeneas spoke
to Homer-Meles: “I am deeply moved
by your creative imaginations! I honour you 2397
as a sublime poet
whose artistry is divine; you
have portrayed Hector and Andromache 2400

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

more heartfelt and intimate
than their close kinsman—this dull Aeneas—
could ever dream of achieving. I see what 2403
you have meant by invoking
your muse deep in your own soul and
heart. I am very thankful to you, an offspring 2406
of the illiterate Argives,
for singing of our Hector with such
perceptive and heart-warming deep sympathy!”” 2409
““Thank you for your gracious
words, my revered hero-poet, Aeneas!””
said Homer-Meles, bowing to him courteously. 2412
Suddenly Aeneas rose,
and spoke: ““Excuse me, Queen Proserpina.
I must take leave of you, now, as my mother 2415

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

 bids me come to see her
in haste.” “Certainly! Thank you,
Aeneas, for guiding Virgil to visit us. 2418
 We will escort him safely
back home. Now, Virgil, do you have
any questions to ask Meles and Outis 2421
 before you return?” *asked*
Proserpina. “Yes! I wish to ask
some conscientious questions at heart,” 2424
 said I, trembling in
excitement. “Go ahead,” *said Meles*.
“Is the extensive text of *The Iliad* 2427
 entirely your creation?
Or did you write it on the basis
of old legends that you inherited from 2430

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

the oral traditions?””

asked I. ““Most episodes were based on
or modified from the old legends sung by 2433

many unknown preliterate
oral poets. But I created some new
episodes such as *the farewell of Hector and* 2436
Andromache,”” said Meles.

““In *the Iliad*, you have portrayed
the Trojan characters such as Priam, 2439
Hector, and Aeneas as

ideal paragons of human beings:
Loyal, earnest, responsible, noble, 2442
and compassionate.

In contrast, however, you depicted
the main Argive characters, Achilles 2445

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

and Agamemnon as vile,
despicable villains in my humble
yet honest opinion,”” *said I, trembling* 2448
in awe. ““I appreciate
your bold, sincere opinions about
my *Iliad*. Tell me why you are perplexed 2451
and disturbed by the contrast,””
said Homer-Meles in composure.
““In the case of Achilles, I suffer 2454
these confounding perplexities:
All Greek authors praised Achilles
as their most invincible valiant warrior, 2457
exalting him as their greatest
patriotic hero,”” *said I.* ““Yes,
Achilles has been the most famous Greek 2460

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

hero,”” said Meles.

““But to me as a naive Roman,””

said I in a grave sincere tone, ““Achilles 2463

was depicted as a vile

blatant traitor who betrayed his

Argive comrades-in-arms: According to 2466

Book One of your *Iliad*,

after the greedy, inept, and arrogant

Argive chief, Agamemnon, seized his Trojan 2469

mistress from him, deeply

insulted proud Achilles cried like

a spoiled brat, calling his goddess mother 2472

for help. When Thetis appeared,

Achilles pestered her to beseech

Zeus to fulfill his bumptious, fanatic plot: 2475

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Let the Trojans mow down
the Achaeans so that Agamemnon
could see how mad he was to disgrace Achilles. 2478

Charming Thetis persuaded
Zeus to grant such a brazen
treason by Achilles to the Achaean 2481

armies. Due to his shameless,
selfish treason, countless Achaean
soldiers perished. Such shocking facts are what 2484

I learnt about Achilles
from your *Iliad*.” “Yes, I confirm
that they are what I wrote in my *Iliad*;” 2487

replied Homer-Meles
in grave, sombre, and resolute tone,
“But they are not my fabrication, at all. 2490

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

They are based on prevailing
legends about the enigmatic and
confusing Trojan War, orally passed down 2493
to me through countless nameless
minstrels from the time immemorial.
I tried my best to make sense from confusing, 2496
diverse, and vague legends.
But I did not alter them to fit
intentionally to my personal taste. 2499
I appreciate your keen
critical observations: those
contradictory aspects of Achilles, 2502
which you've rightly pointed out,
perplex you—the poet who sings of
the glory of Rome in the pious person 2505

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of Aeneas. But my real
objective in writing *the Iliad*
is neither to glorify Achilles 2508
nor to vilify him.
My sole mission was to unfold
a poignant, tragic story of a complex man: 2511
Achilles had excessive
ambitions for his vainglorious
fame. He strove to achieve it by any means, 2514
even if it might harm
his comrades. Achilles was a fierce
and invincible warrior against his foes, 2517
but he was a helpless
coward yielding to crazy angers
of his pride and vile ambitions for glory 2520

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of his fame. If the Greeks
have admired him as their supreme
patriot, let it be so in their delusions. 2523

How could sane people make up
such a whim? Nothing is harder than
to comprehend the whims of the ignorant.”” 2526

*Deeply moved by his clear,
coherent elucidations, I bowed
to him and spoke: ““Thank you, my divine poet 2529*

Homer-Meles! Now, I
begin to learn how to perceive
the profound meaning of your *Iliad*. 2532

You portrayed Achilles
as realistic as a proud, selfish,
ambitious, and complicated man rather than 2535

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making up adulatory
idealization of the Greek warrior.
May I ask another question about Achilles?”” 2538
“Certainly, Virgil. Your
perceptive questions make me to
reflect afresh on my *Iliad* in-depth,”” 2541
said Homer-Meles in
sincerity. “The fateful duel
between Hector and Achilles in Book 22 2544
perplexes my wit:” *confessed I,*
“I presume that the traditional
legends prescribed that Hector had been fated 2547
to die on that day; no one
should expect that Hector would defeat
Achilles. But I was dismayed to read how 2550

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unfairly the duel between
Achilles and Hector was manipulated
by deceptive Athena, who cheated Hector. 2553
It was not an honourable
man-to-man duel but murdering
a brave, loyal defender of his country 2556
by a vicious goddess
who manipulated a selfish, vile
traitor of his army as a lethal tool 2559
to avenge her hurt pride;
She lost in an absurd beauty
contest judged by the Trojan prince, Paris, 2562
who chose Aphrodite
as the most beautiful goddess
over Hera and Athena. I surmise 2565

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

all this from the fabulous
stories in *The Cypria* attributed
to Stasinus of Cyprus, or Homer 2568
who gave it as a dowry
to him.” “Nonsense! I did neither
write *The Cypria* nor had such a son-in-law;” 2571
said Homer-Meles in
sombre indignation, “How could
you believe in such absurd, inane farces, 2574
prattled by witless minstrels
to pander credulous base crowds?
Do you really believe that Hera, the very queen 2577
of the Olympian deities,
and Athena, the wise goddess
of strategy, actually appeared to Paris? 2580

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

Who did give Paris, a mere
fleeting worthless mortal lad, such
a super-divine authority, daring to make 2583
bold judgment on divine beauty?
Why would Hera and Athena care
to hear what a witless lad may babble, 2586
and take it so seriously
to destroy the whole innocent
Trojans to avenge their pride hurt by Paris?" 2589
“My reason cannot believe
in such absurd affairs;” *confessed I,*
“And yet we have been so used to hear the glib 2592
fabulous fables, we tend
to take them for granted, as if they
were true. I noticed that you had avoided 2595

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

from alluding to the fable
as if it was the primary cause
of the Trojan War in your *Iliad*. 2598

Please enlighten me what
were the real causes of the enigmatic
Trojan War, which you have so subtly evaded 2601
to mention explicitly.”

Beaming subtle smiles, Homer-Meles
spoke in a pensive solemn voice: “I do not know 2604

what was the real causes
of the intricate, perplexing, and
complicated Trojan War, at all. I am 2607

utterly unable to
explain why the Trojan War occurred,
how it began, and how it ended eventually. 2610

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

My *Iliad* is not
a chronological narrative:
I think, Virgil, that your *Aeneid* is a far 2613
more finished narrative
about the origin, gradual progress,
and achievements of Rome up to your era 2616
than my *Iliad* is about
the mystery of the Trojan War.
As you see, Virgil, my *Iliad* has been left 2619
poorly unfinished:
It fails to expound why and how
the Trojan War began and ended eventually. 2622
It does not chronicle
what happened during the preceding
nine years of the ten-year-long fierce gory war. 2625

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

At its very beginning,
I have invoked the muse in me
to tell about the terrible fierce anger 2628
of brave, proud Achilles,
which was incited by arrogant
Agamemnon, and the dire and horrible 2631
consequences to its poor,
countless, and innocent victims
among their own Argive comrades in misery. 2634
Even the story about the main
protagonist—Achilles— remains
quite inconclusive in my *Iliad*: 2637
It does not include
an episode of the alluded
early death of Achilles; whether he 2640

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

met a glorious death
as a valiant hero in battle,
or a miserable end as a crazy villain. 2643
I strove to understand
the complex mind of Achilles
from the prevalent confusing legends 2646
about the enigmatic man—
Achilles— as best as I could:
I was deeply dismayed and distressed 2649
to hear from elder minstrels
the horrible, abominable,
and unholy maltreatment of Hector's 2652
dead body by Achilles,
even many days after he slew him.”
At this point, I could not help but interrupt: 2655

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“Vividly I do
remember the shocking, gruesome,
and disgusting scenes in your Book 22. 2658

I presume that the ancient
Greek minstrels did not make up such
abhorrent, depraved, and despicable stories. 2661

If so, why did the proud
Greek hero Achilles indulge in
such misdeeds, destroying his coveted fame? 2664

Do you have any clue?”

Then thoughtful Homer-Meles replied
in grave stance: “I do not know the real reasons 2667

for such bizarre behaviours
in which Achilles fell to indulge.
He must have lost his sane mind, and degraded 2670

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

into a crazy lunatic brute:
One may surmise that Achilles
was deadly stunned to realize that everyone 2673
was fated to die, when his dear
friend Patroclus was killed by Hector
in the battle. Suddenly, Achilles's blind excessive 2676
ambition for fame collapsed
into nothing. Terrible fears
of his own death overwhelmed helpless desperate 2679
Achilles: Hector appeared
to him as if he were an awful
agent of his own impending inevitable 2682
death: to kill Hector was
for Achilles to get rid of
the dreadful agent of Death. But soon he 2685

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

realized that his killing
of Hector did not solve his troubles
of his own mortality at all. In utter 2688
despairs, he abused Hector's
corpse; the more he pretended to exult
in his triumph over Hector, the deeper he saw 2691
the glory of vain fame
vanishing into nothing, and dire
horrible fears about his death overwhelmed 2694
Achilles. When he
celebrated the pompous funeral
game for Patroclus, he saw how grim Death 2697
was threatening him, as if
he were watching his own funeral.
Then, amid a deadly night, Achilles had 2700

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

an astonishing visitor
in his tent: it was the frail, sad, old king
of Troy—Priam. He came alone to plead 2703
Achilles for ransom
of the corpse of his beloved son—Hector.
Courageous and noble Priam defied the certain 2706
dangers of his death
in coming to the cruel killer
of his many brave sons and innocent Trojans, 2709
as if he descended to
the Hades to recover Hector's body
for a proper burial in his beloved Troy. 2712
Suddenly, Achilles
came to his senses, at last; he realized
that death was the inevitable and natural 2715

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

event universal to all;
One must accept it as it is.
Achilles wept, and yielded the Hector's body 2718
to his loving father.
Here ends *The Iliad* abruptly.
As you see, Virgil, my *Iliad* has been left 2721
very poorly unfinished;
And yet it was the best way in which
I could conclude a poignant story of a proud, 2724
complex, ambitious, and
invincible warrior: how he saw,
at last, the sublime immortal nobility 2727
in the person of helpless
Priam who defied and transcended
fears of Death—a moving inner awakening 2730

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

for Achilles to realize,
even if just temporary: that is
all what I could do and left it unfinished!”” 2733

Thus finished Homer-Meles
his earnest cogent elucidations
of his sublime tragedy— The Iliad, 2736
beaming numinous lights
from his noble sagacious visage.

I fell speechless and wept, elated in awe 2739
and sheer thrills. When I

restored my senses, I confessed to
my revered divine poet: ““You’ve awoken me 2742

to grasp the profound meaning
of your sublime Iliad, at last.
Please forgive me for my wrong, witless, and 2745

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

bigoted criticisms.

I avow that the final Book 24

of *The Iliad* must be your own unique 2748

creation that transcends

the confusions in preceding

diverse legends of the enigmatic 2751

Trojan War and bring forth

a deeply meaningful and impressive

conclusion to your new profound story about 2754

the mystery of human

destiny!”” *Then Homer-Meles said:*

““It is my invention; but I was inspired by 2757

the ancient Mesopotamian

epic about Gilgamesh, bearing

the incipit: *He who Saw the Deep... ””* 2760

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

“Did you read *The Epic of Gilgamesh*?” asked I in sheer excitement and reverence. “No. I heard 2763
only its summary, sung by
a travelling minstrel; and yet it
inspired me deeply to muse on the mystery 2766
of human destiny. Have you,
Virgil, read the very progenitor of
epics?” asked Homer-Meles in a pleasant 2769
surprise. “No. But I heard
its gist from Aeneas, who had read
its entire text and copied it on clay tablets 2772
in the cuneiform script.
Gilgamesh’s eventual awakening
to the inevitability of death as a man 2775

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

reminds me of your sublime
conclusion of *The Iliad*. Now,
I realize that such a meaningful and 2778
impressive conclusion
for my humble *Aeneid* is far
beyond my wit and lot,”” *confessed I in awe.* 2781
At this point, Homer-Outis
spoke: ““I appreciate your enlightening
discussions: Virgil asked perceptive questions 2784
about Meles’s portrayal
of Achilles in his *Iliad*;
And he expounded the profound meanings of 2787
his sublime tragedy,
The Iliad for us to comprehend.
Have you, Virgil, such crucial questions 2790

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

about my *Odyssey* for
good, constructive discussions?””
““Yes, I have a question on your portrayal 2793
of Achilles in Hades,””
said I with enthusiasm: ““In your
pioneering *Myth of Odysseus*, Achilles saw 2796
Odysseus, visiting alive
the realm of the dead; he cried out
in sheer surprise: ““*O son of Laertes,* 2799
Odysseus, clever man
of endless tactics! What greater feat
can your shrewd mind contrive after this bold 2802
adventure? How did you
find your way down to this unseen realm
where the senseless, burnt-out wraiths of mortals 2805

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make their timeless prison? ” ”

“ “Son of Peleus, Achilles, ” ” said

Odysseus, “ “I had to venture here to find out 2808

how to journey home safe:

I have not yet neared Achaea;

never set foot on my homeland. My life 2811

is endless, miserable

trials. But you, Achilles—none

in the world is more blessed than you are. 2814

When you were alive, we honoured

you as if you were a god; down here,

you lord it over the dead in your power. 2817

So, grieve no more at dying young,

Achilles. ” ” “ “Your glib talk, smart

Odysseus, ” ” said the Achilles’s ghost, 2820

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““may hearten the alive,
but you know nothing of dying
as yet! Hear me, what once so proud Achilles's 2823
shade says: I would rather
slave on earth for another man,
some humble tenant farmer who scrapes poor soil 2826
to keep alive, than rule down here
over all the senseless dead!”” This is
what I read in the Book 11 of your *Odyssey*.”” 2829
““Yes, that is what I wrote.
You recalled Achilles's frank
confession remarkably well. Do you also 2832
remember that Plato
wished to delete it from my *Odyssey*
as he judged that I had degraded his revered 2835

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

hero, valiant Achilles,
as a witless brazen coward?””
““Yes, I do. Why did you portray Achilles,”” 2838
asked I with hesitation,
““in such a shocking and unexpected
way in your *Odyssey*?”” ““What Achilles 2841
spoke to Odysseus, I aver,””
said Homer-Outis with resolute stance,
““is not a cowardly complain, prattled 2844
by a witless man, at all;
It is the vital wisdom which
new Achilles finally attained after he 2847
met death; the fame he coveted
so blindly while he was alive, he
realized that it had no meaning in truth! 2850

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

Hence, Achilles became
wiser rather than a coward
after his death. This is the very essence 2853
of what I tried to impart
whoever happens to listen to
my *Odyssey*.”” *At this point, Homer-Meles* 2856
joined with us: ““Deep from my heart,
I congratulate you, my dear Outis,
for your achievement of the wise conclusion!”” 2859
Elated in new insight
and with deep reverence, I whispered:
““Thank you for your gracious enlightening. 2862
Now, I see the light of
your profound wisdom and artistry
of sublime epics, pervading deep into my mind!”” 2865

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

Then Homer-Outis spoke

*in sombre tone: "I confess that I
had to leave *The Odyssey* unfinished."* 2868

"What do you mean?" asked I.

*"I struggled for many years to write
its final, concluding Book 24. But I failed* 2871

*in bringing forth what I
imagined into concrete words. Hence,
my *Odyssey* lacks a meaningful conclusion."* 2874

*"How strange! I read Book 24
in my copy of *The Odyssey*," said I.*

"What? Tell me what you have read on it," said 2877

Homer-Outis in shock.

*"It is a mixture of weird and
disjointed episodes: First, Hermes leads the ghosts* 2880

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

of the suitors, slain by Odysseus.
They meet the ghosts of Achilles,
Patroclus, Antilochus, and Ajax. Then 2883
the ghosts of Agamemnon
and his comrades, who were butchered
by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, appeared. 2886
Achilles greets Agamemnon
and comments on his wretched murder
by his wife. Agamemnon boasts how he gave 2889
Achilles elaborate
funeral and commemoration.
Then Agamemnon noted Amphimedon's ghost; 2892
He tells how Odysseus killed
all suitors in lengthy chattering with
Agamemnon's ghost. Suddenly, the author 2895

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makes abrupt changes in	
the topic of his episodes: Odysseus	
and his men rush to see old King Laertes	2898
at his farmhouse. The scene	
of recognition between Odysseus	
and his dear old father after twenty years	2901
reads quite unnatural	
and awkward, I think. Soon, they face	
the stark reality: fierce attacks by vengeful	2904
families of the slain suitors.	
Eupithes, the father of Antinous,	
incites Ithacans to revolt against Odysseus.	2907
He and his armed supporters	
storm Laertes's farmhouse. To attest	
his courage and prowess for Telemachus,	2910

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

old warrior, Laertes, brandishes
his spear, wings it, and kills Eupithes.
Then Athena hands down her packs of peace 2913
between both sides for good.
That is how *The Odyssey* ends as
I remember it,”” said I. ““It is a blatant 2916
and treacherous hoax,””
sighed Homer-Outis in dismay.
At this point, Homer-Meles spoke: ““I am 2919
indignant that a vile
felon dared to disgrace your divine
Odyssey. I hope that righteous people will 2922
rectify the despicable
offence to the sanctity of
epic poetry.”” ““Thank you Meles for 2925

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

your knowing sympathy.””
“I am genuinely interested in
learning how you planned to bring a meaningful 2928
conclusion to your *Odyssey*,””
said Meles. “I realized that I needed
to write a new epic to follow *The Odyssey* 2931
as its relevant sequel:
To avoid violent cruel conflicts
among people, Odysseus should be compelled 2934
to take a life-long exile
from Ithaca; his faithful wise wife,
Penelope, decides to join with Odysseus 2937
to learn the mystery of
human nature through their audacious
adventures in the tumultuous life-long exile,”” 2940

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

said Outis. ““It is a lofty
sublime task but extremely difficult
to accomplish!”” *exclaimed Meles in awe.* 2943

““Now, I see your divine
imaginations of the sequel to
your *Odyssey*. It reminds me of a weird 2946

Greek epic, called *Telegony*,
attributed to Cinaethon of Sparta;
It claims to be a sequel to *The Odyssey*,”” 2949

said I. ““What? Tell us what
you know about it,”” *said Meles in*
a surprise. ““I heard only its summary 2952

from a travelling minstrel:
Its main character, Telegonus, is
a son of Odysseus borne by Circe on Aeaea. 2955

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

Forced by a storm, he happened
to land on Ithaca. Unwittingly, he
stole Odysseus's cattle to relieve his hunger. 2958

Odysseus appeared and fought
against the foreign thief; Telegonus
managed to kill Odysseus in the fierce fray. 2961

While mortally wounded
Odysseus lay dying, Telegonus
and Odysseus eventually recognize the blood-
relationship between them. 2964

Telegonus repented his awful mistake.
He brings Odysseus's body to Aeaea for
his stately burial. 2967

He also invited Penelope and
Telemachus to dwell in Aeaea. Circe 2970

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

make both Penelope and
Telemachus immortal. The story
ended with double weddings: Telegonus 2973
married Penelope;
Telemachus took Circe as his wife.
That is all what I can recall about *Telegony*,” 2976
said I. ““It is an irksome,
disgusting travesty. How could
they dare to claim it to be a sequel to 2979
Outis’s heroic work—
The Odyssey?”” laments Meles
in stern indignation. We fell in a deep silence. 2982
At that time, the avid queen
Proserpina announced courteously:
““I thank you all for your enlightening 2985

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

discussions on the epics.

Now, Virgil, your impromptu visit
here, is far overdue. It is time for you to
return to the world above.” 2988

*Then my revered divine poet,
Homer-Meles bade me heart farewell:* 2991

“When you return to
the world of living people, tell them
what you have seen here as Aeneas did
in your epic: how we
fare in the journey after death.” 2994

Then Homer-Outis bade me touching farewell: 2997

“When it happens for you
to come this way at your own ripe time,
come to join us; we would love to have you 3000

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

with us: You shall meet with
all kinds of souls from everywhere
on earth and from every era; we shall have 3003
eternity to converse
on epics. As for your *Myth of*
Aeneas, I foresee that it will evolve into 3006
a sublime *Commedia*,
to be sung by a divine poet,
your descendant a thousand years later; 3009
He will sing of how
our souls adventure from the low
to the high in accord with the eternal ways. 3012
As for my unfinished
Odyssey and its unborn sequels,
I am hopeful that someday, after waiting 3015

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

for many thousands of years,
a conscientious poet will complete
them as a hymn to sacred human conscience. 3018

When you return to
the world of living people,
please share what we discussed here with them. 3021

Till we see again, farewell,
devout Virgil!”” *Elated in awe*
and ineffable emotions, I tried 3024

to say something deep from
my heart and soul; but no word came
out from my sad yet elated thankful heart. 3027

Somehow, the two Homers,
Proserpina, and everything there
began to move stately away and fade afar, 3030

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*merging into a point
of mystic light beyond the River
of No Return. Warm tears of deep sorrow* 3033
*and strange feelings of blissful
elation welled up deep from my meek
and thankful heart. Then, I woke up from* 3036
*the numinous dream, and
found you here looking after me,
my dear trusty friend, Varius!" "O Virgil,* 3039
*your dream is a divine
revelation of the sublime
in poetry!" exclaimed I in elation.* 3042
He beamed faint, shy, subtle smiles,
and spoke: "*All this may be a fleeting
false dream, conjured up by my childish mind;*" 3045

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*And yet it seems to me
far truer than anything I have
actually experienced in my humble* 3048
*meek life. I wish you to
remember me with my last dream that I
have just confided to you.” Overwhelmed by* 3051
*ineffable emotions,
I fell speechless: tears brimmed in my eyes.
“Why do you weep, my beloved friend, Varius?”* 3054
*said he, holding gently
my trembling hands. But I could not
utter what my heart tried to express in word.* 3057
*Suddenly, Virgil beamed
numinous light and exclaimed in poise:
“Lo, here comes my ship to sail to the mystic* 3060

Virgil's Last Dream of Aeneas and Homer

*realm of Dis! Now, I have
to leave The Aeneid unfinished;
And yet, I am happy as it came deep 3063
from my heart and soul to
sing of the supreme justice of
Rome for the whole of humanity. Please let it 3066
see the light as it is!”*

*That was Virgil's very last word
in this world, Augustus!’ Thus ends Varius 3069
his recollection of
the deeply moving final departure
of the sublime poet Virgil from this world. 3072*

*He noticed warm tears welling
up in the eyes of the elated and
pensive emperor in a deep silence. 3075*

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*At last, Augustus breaks
the vigil of eloquent silence
in solemn and resolute voice: 'Please publish* 3078
the sublime epic of
our beloved Virgil, *The Aeneid*,
as he had entrusted it to you before 3081
he left Rome to visit Greece.
I will provide you with whatever
you need to carry out timely the great task. 3084
As for Virgil's last
numinous dream, it is too abstruse
for me to comprehend its profound meaning. 3087
Please write down what godlike
Virgil has imparted to you as soon
as possible, lest they may fade away from 3090

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man's tenuous fleeting
memories. I will keep them deep
in the inner shrine of my heart; I revere 3093
them as devout Virgil's
sublime timeless teachings to me
and whole mankind, here and yet to come!' 3096

The End

Epilogue

[I] The present work is a fictional narrative poem about the great Roman poet Publius Vergilius Maro (70-19 BCE), also known as Virgil; it is neither a factual biography of the historical Roman citizen Vergil nor an academic comment on his epic poem: *The Aeneid*.

[II] Although the dialogues between the characters, 'Varius' and 'Augustus' in this work are merely fictional imaginations, the author has tried them to be based on the relevant classical Roman and Greek texts in English translations to the best of his ability as much as they may be workable with the following references:

(II-A) *The Aeneid of Virgil*: translated by Fairclough, H.R. (1935), Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press;
The Aeneid of Virgil: translated by Fitzgerald, R. (1981), Vintage Classics.

(II-B). *The Iliad of Homer*: translated by Murray, A. (1924), Loeb Classical Library, Harvard Univ. Press;
The Iliad of Homer: translated by Lattimore, R. (1951), University of Chicago Press; and
The Iliad of Homer: translated by Fagles, R (1990), Penguin Books.

(II-C). *The Odyssey of Homer*: translated by Murray, A. (1919), Loeb Classical Library, Harvard Univ. Press
The Odyssey of Homer: translated by Fitzgerald, R. (1961), Doubleday & Company; and
The Odyssey of Homer: translated by Fagles, R. (1996), Penguin Books.

(II-D). *Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns and Homeric*, translated by Evelyn-White, H. G. (1914), Loeb Classical Library, Harvard Univ. Press

(II-E) *The Republic of Plato*, translated by Shorey, P. (1937), Loeb Classical Library; Harvard Univ. Press
The Republic of Plato, translated by Allen, R. E. (2006), Yale University Press.

(II-F). *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, translated by George, A. (1999), Penguin Books.

(II-G). *La Divina Commedia* of Dante Alighieri, edited and annotated by Grandgent, C.H., revised by Singleton, C. S. (1972), Harvard University Press.
The Divine Comedy of Dante, translated by Singleton, C. S. (1970-80), Princeton University Press.
The Divine Comedy of Dante, translated by Bickelsteth, G. L. (1981), Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
The Divine Comedy of Dante, translated by White, L. G. (1948), Pantheon Books, New York.

(II-H) *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* by Jacobsen, T. (1976), Yale University Press.

(II-I) *Early Greek Myth* by Gantz, T. (1993), Johns Hopkins University Press.

(II-J) *The East Face of Helicon* by West, M. L. (1997), Clarendon, Oxford University Press.

[III] The relevance between the present fiction and the above references may be summarized as follows:

(III-1) The pithy gist of the first six books of Virgil's *Aeneid*, narrated by the character *Varius* as the literary executor of Virgil, to the character *Augustus* as the first emperor of the Roman Empire {lines 1 – 1057 in this work} was based on the classic texts of *the Aeneid* and introductory remarks of their translators in reference (II-A).

(III-2). The character 'Virgil's' citation from Book 20 of the *Iliad* to the character 'Homer-Meles' {lines 1395 – 1408} was based on the classic texts in reference (II-B).

(III-3). The imaginary discussions about the *Epic Cycles* between *Homer-Meles* and *Virgil* {lines 1467 – 1509} were based on the classic texts in reference (II-D).

(III-4) *Virgil's* confession to the character '*Homer-Outis*' about the influence of Plato's *Myth of Er* in his dialogue, the *Republic*, {lines 1569 – 1602}, was based on the classic text of the *Republic* in reference (II-E).

(III-5). Homer-Meles's recitation for the character '*Aeneas*' of the last conversations between the character '*Hector*' and the character '*Andromache*' at the high tower of the Scaean Gates before Hector returns to the battlefields, never to come back his home alive {lines 1676 – 1785} was based on the Book 6 of *The Iliad* in the reference (II-B).

(III-6) The character *Aeneas's* mention {line 1231 – 1233} and the character '*Proserpina's*' mention {1610 – 1619} about the *Epic of Gilgamesh* were based on the references (II-F) and (II-H).

(III-7) *Virgil's* discussions with *Homer-Meles* about the duel between Hector and Achilles in Book 22 of the *Iliad* {lines 1957- 1975} and the fabulous legends in the *Cypria* attributed to Stasinus of Cyprus {lines 1957 – 2004} were based on the relevant texts in reference (II-B) and (II-D), respectively.

(III-8). *Virgil's* quotation from Book 11 of the *Odyssey* of the episode about Achilles's ghost in the Hades {lines 2172 – 2208} was based on the classic texts in reference (II-C).

[IV]. All other episodes in this narrative are purely fictional imaginations for which the author is unable to provide any reference or claim them as if they were historical facts, especially the alleged last dream of the most important character *Virgil*:

(IV-1). How *Virgil* happened to meet with Aeneas's spirit who guides him to meet the spirit of *Homer-Meles* and *Homer-Outis* in Elysium are merely the author's imaginary inventions, inspired by the Book 6 of *The Aeneid* of Virgil (II-A) and by the *Divine Comedy* of Dante [see the references in (II-G)].

(IV-2) The presumption in making up the character *Homer-Meles* as the author of the *Iliad* and the character *Homer-Outis* as that of the *Odyssey* in this fiction is merely a hypothesis imagined by the author to make sense the imaginary discussions among the character *Virgil* and the legendary ancient Greek poets in the present fiction. The possibility of such distinct authorship is unresolved questions [see the references in (II-I) and (II-J)].

(IV-3). The prophetic allusion by the character *Homer-Outis* {lines 2267 – 2274} to *La Commedia* of Dante was imagined from Vergil's vital influences on Dante who revered him for being the wise and trusty guide of the character pilgrim *Dante* in the numinous journey through *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* of *La Commedia* [see the references in (II-G)].

- [V] The present fictional narrative is written in the syllabic tercet stanza: each tercet consists of three lines of varying syllabic length: first line of six-syllables, second of eight and the third of ten-syllables. It is not a traditional English poem with the proper accentual prosody. Nevertheless, this strange syllabic writing is what its author could try best in his pidgin English to sing of the lofty ideas and sublime spirit of his revered ancient Greek and Roman poets who have inspired and nurtured him.
- [VI] The author wishes to acknowledge and appreciate deep inspirations and soul-searching influences by *The Divine Comedy* of Dante (1265 – 1321). The adaptation of the tercet stanzas in his humble works has been inspired by the terza rima of *La Commedia* of Dante. Although the sublime spirituality, the beauty of the exquisite poetic form, and the deeply moving music of *La Commedia* of Dante are high above far beyond his reach, yet they inspire him like the mysterious spiritual stars shining in the inner heaven.

[VII] The author wishes to thank his daughter Florence (a professor of classics) for her attention to this work and discussions for its improvement.

[VIII] The cover photograph of the moon, rising over a lighthouse on an isle amid the immense sea, was taken in Nova Scotia, Canada, by the author.

Art Aeon

